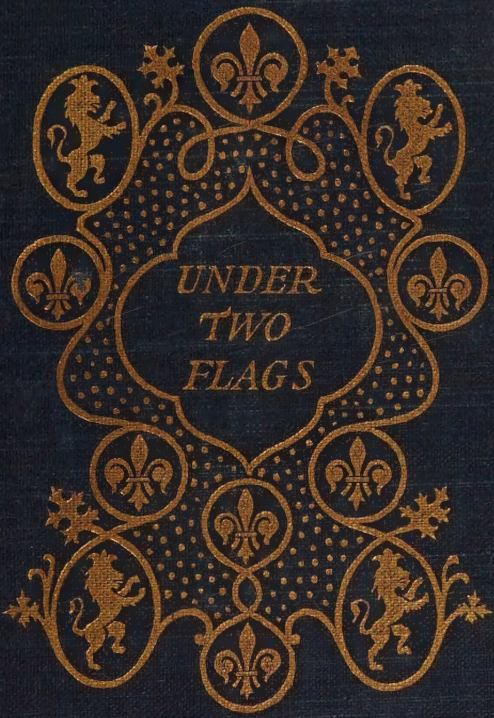
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WITHDRAWN

Bella Jane Smith

WASHINGTON

"*You lie!* And you know that you lie!"

Page 337.

UNDER TWO FLAGS

A NOVEL

BY

"OUIDA"

AUTHOR OF "IDALIA," "RANDOLPH GORDON," "STRATHMORE," "CECIL CASTLEMAINE'S GAGE," ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

ILLUSTRATED FROM

DRAWINGS BY G. MONTBARD

ENGRAVED BY E. DERBIER

PHILADELPHIA

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UNDER TWO FLAGS

CHAPTER XXI.

CIGARETTE EN CONDOTTIERA.

CIGARETTE always went fast. She had a bird-like way of skimming her ground that took her over it with wonderful swiftness, all the tassels, and ribbon knots, and sashes with which her uniform was rendered so gay and so distinctive fluttering behind her, and her little military boots, with the bright spurs twinkling, flying over the earth too lightly for a speck of dust, though it lay thick as August suns could parch it, to rest upon her. Thus she went now, along the lovely moonlight, singing her drinking song so fast and so loud that had it been any other than this young fire-eater of the African squadrons it might have been supposed she sang out of fear and bravado—two things, however, that never touched Cigarette; for she exulted in danger as friskily as a young salmon exults in the first fresh, crisp, tumbling crest of a sea-wave, and would have backed up the most vainglorious word she could have spoken with the cost of her life, had need been. Suddenly, as she went, she heard a shout on the still night air—very still now, that the lights, and the melodies, and the laughter of Châteauroy's villa lay far behind, and the town of Algiers was yet distant, with its lamps glittering down by the sea.

The shout was, "*A moi, Roumis ! Pour la France !*" And Cigarette knew the voice, ringing melodiously and calmly still, though it gave the sound of alarm.

"Cigarette *au secour !*" she cried in answer; she had cried it many a time over the heat of battle-fields, and when the wounded men in the dead of the sickly night writhed under the knife of the camp-thieves. If she had gone like the wind before, she went like the lightning now.

A few yards onward she saw a confused knot of horses and of riders struggling one with another in a cloud of white dust, silvery and hazy in the radiance of the moon.

The center figure was Cecil's; the four others were Arabs, armed to the teeth and mad with drink, who had spent the whole day in drunken debauchery, pouring in raki down their throats until they were wild with its poisonous fire, and had darted headlong all abreast down out of the town overriding all that came in their way, and lashing their poor beasts with their sabers till the horses' flanks ran blood. Just as they neared Cecil, they had knocked aside and trampled over a worn-out old colon, of age too feeble for him to totter in time from their path. Cecil had reined up and shouted to them to pause; they, inflamed with the perilous drink, and senseless with the fury which seems to possess every Arab once started in a race neck to neck, were too blind to see, and too furious to care, that they were faced by a soldier of France, but rode down on him at once, with their curled sabers flashing round their heads. His horse stood the shock gallantly, and he sought at first only to parry their thrusts and to cut through their stallions' reins; but the latter were chain bridles, and only notched his sword as the blade struck them, and the former became too numerous and too

savagely dealt to be easily played with in carte and tierce. The Arabs were dead-drunk, he saw at a glance, and had got the blood-thirst upon them ; roused and burning with brandy and raki, these men were like tigers to deal with ; the words he had spoken they never heard, and their horses hemmed him in powerless, while their steel flashed on every side ;—they were not of the tribe of the Khalifa.

If he struck not, and struck not surely, he saw that a few moments more of that moonlight night were all that he would live. He wished to avoid bloodshed, both because his sympathies were always with the conquered tribes, and because he knew that every one of these quarrels and combats between the vanquisher and the vanquished served further to widen the breach, already broad enough, between them. But it was no longer a matter of choice with him, as his shoulder was grazed by a thrust which, but for a swerve of his horse, would have pierced to his lungs ; and the four riders, yelling like madmen, forced the animal back on his haunches, and assaulted him with breathless violence. He swept his own arm back, and brought his saber down straight through the sword-arm of the foremost ; the limb was cleft through as if the stroke of an axe had severed it, and, thrice infuriated, the Arabs closed in on him. The points of their weapons were piercing his harness when, sharp and swift one on another, three shots hissed past him ; the nearest of his assailants fell stone dead, and the others, wounded and startled, loosed their hold, shook their reins, and tore off down the lonely road, while the dead man's horse, shaking his burden from him out of the stirrups, followed them at a headlong gallop through a cloud of dust.

" That was a pretty cut through the arm ; better had it been through the throat. Never do things by halves,

ami Victor," said Cigarette carelessly, as she thrust her pistols back into her sash, and looked, with the tranquil appreciation of a connoisseur, on the brown, brawny, naked limb, where it lay severed on the sand, with the hilt of the weapon still hanging in the sinewy fingers. Cecil threw himself from his saddle and gazed at her in bewildered amazement; he had thought those sure, cool, death-dealing shots had come from some Spahis or Chasseur.

"I owe you my life!" he said rapidly. "But—good God!—you have shot the fellow dead——"

Cigarette shrugged her shoulders with a contemptuous glance at the Bedouin's corpse.

"To be sure—I am not a bungler."

"Happily for me, or I had been where he lies now. But wait—let me look; there may be breath in him yet."

Cigarette laughed, offended and scornful, as with the offense and scorn of one whose first science was impeached.

"*Pas si bête!* Look and welcome; but if you find any life in that Arbi, make a laugh of it before all the army to-morrow."

She was at her fiercest. A thousand new emotions had been roused in her that night, bringing pain with them, that she bitterly resented; and, moreover, this child of the Army of Africa caught fire at the flame of battle with instant contagion, and had seen slaughter around her from her first infancy.

Cecil, disregarding her protest, stooped and raised the fallen Bedouin. He saw at a glance that she was right; the lean, dark, lustful face was set in the rigidity of death; the bullet had passed straight through the temples.

"Did you never see a dead man before?" demanded

Cigarette impatiently, as he lingered;—even in this moment he had more thought of this *Arbico* than he had of her!

He laid the Arab's body gently down, and looked at her with a glance that, rightly or wrongly, she thought had a rebuke in it.

"Very many. But—it is never a pleasant sight. And they were in drink; they did not know what they did."

"Pardieu! What divine pity! Good powder and ball were sore wasted, it seems; you would have preferred to lie there yourself, it appears. I beg your pardon for interfering with the preference."

Her eyes were flashing, her lips very scornful and wrathful. This was his gratitude!

"Wait, wait," said Cecil rapidly, laying his hand on her shoulder, as she flung herself away. "My dear child, do not think me ungrateful. I know well enough I should be a dead man myself had it not been for your gallant assistance. Believe me, I thank you from my heart."

"But you think me 'unsexed,' all the same! I see, *beau lion!*"

The word had rankled in her; she could launch it now with telling reprisal.

He smiled; but he saw that this phrase, which she had overheard, had not alone incensed, but had wounded her.

"Well, a little, perhaps," he said gently. "How should it be otherwise? And, for that matter, I have seen many a great lady look on and laugh her soft, cruel laughter, while the pheasants were falling by hundreds, or the stags being torn by the hounds. They called it 'sport,' but there was not much difference—in the mercy of it, at least—from your war. And they had not a tithe of your courage."

The answer failed to conciliate her; there was an accent of compassion in it that ill suited her pride, and a lack of admiration that was not less new and unwelcome.

"It was well for you that I *was* unsexed enough to be able to send an ounce of lead into a drunkard!" she pursued with immeasurable disdain. "If I had been like that dainty aristocrat down there—pardieu! it had been worse for you. I should have screamed, and fainted, and left you to be killed, while I made a *tableau*. Oh-hé, that is to be 'feminine,' is it not?"

"Where did you see that lady?" he asked in some surprise.

"Oh! I was there!" answered Cigarette, with a toss of her head southward to where the villa lay. "I went to see how you would keep your promise."

"Well, you saw I kept it."

She gave her little teeth a sharp click like the click of a trigger.

"Yes. And I would have forgiven you if you had broken it."

"Would you? I should not have forgiven myself."

"Ah! you are just like Marquise. And you will end like him."

"Very probably."

She knitted her pretty brows, standing there in his path with the pistols thrust in her sash, and her hands resting lightly on her hips, as a good workman rests after a neatly finished job, and her dainty fez set half on one side on her brown tangled curls, while upon them the intense luster of the moonlight streamed, and in the dust, well-nigh at their feet, lay the gaunt, white-robed form of the dead Arab, with the olive saturnine face turned upward to the stars.

"Why did you give those chessmen to that silver pheasant?" she asked him abruptly.

"Silver pheasant?"

"Yes. See how she sweeps—sweeps—sweeps so languid, so brilliant, so useless—bah! Why did you give them?"

"She admired them. It was not much to give."

"Diantre! You would not have given them to a daughter of the people."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Oh-hé! Because her hands would be hard, and brown, and coarse, not fit for those ivory puppets; but Miladi's are white like the ivory, and cannot soil it. She will handle them so gracefully, for five minutes; and then buy a new toy, and let her lap-dog break yours!"

"Like enough." He said it with his habitual gentle temper, but there was a shadow of pain in the words. The chessmen had become in some sort like living things to him, through long association; he had parted from them not without regret, though for the moment courtesy and generosity of instinct had overcome it; and he knew that it was but too true how in all likelihood these trifles of his art, that had brought him many a solace and been his companion through many a lonely hour, would be forgotten by the morrow, where he had bestowed them, and at best put aside in a cabinet to lie unnoticed among bronzes or porcelain, or be set on some boudoir-table to be idled with in the mimic warfare that would serve to cover some listless flirtation.

Cigarette, quick to sting, but as quick to repent using her sting, saw the regret in him; with the rapid, uncalculating liberality of an utterly unselfish and intensely impulsive nature, she hastened to make amends

by saying what was like gall on her tongue in the utterance:

"*Tiens!*" she said quickly. "Perhaps she will value them more than that. I know nothing of the aristocrats—not I! When you were gone, she championed you against the Black Hawk. She told him that if you had not been a gentleman before you came into the ranks, she had never seen one. *Ma cantche!* she spoke well, if you had but heard her."

"She did!"

She saw his glance brighten as it turned on her in a surprised gratification.

"Well! What is there so wonderful?"

Cigarette asked it with a certain petulance and doggedness, taking a namesake out of her breast-pocket, biting its end off, and striking a fusee. A word from this aristocrat was more welcome to him than a bullet that had saved his life!

Her generosity had gone very far, and, like most generosity, got nothing for its pains.

He was silent a few moments, tracing lines in the dust with the point of his scabbard. Cigarette, with the cigar in her mouth, stamped her foot impatiently.

"Corporal Victor! are you going to dream there all night? What is to be done with this dog of an Arbico?"

She was angered by him; she was in the mood to make herself seem all the rougher, fiercer, naughtier, and more callous. She had shot the man—pouf! what of that?—She had shot men before, as all Africa knew. She would defend a half-fledged bird, a terrified sheep, a worn-out old cur; but a man! Men were the normal and natural food for pistols and rifles, she considered. A state of society in which fire-arms had been unknown was a thing Cigarette had never heard

of, and in which she would have contumeliously disbelieved if she had been told of it.

Cecil looked up from his musing; he thought what a pity it was this pretty, graceful French kitten was such a blood-thirsty young panther at heart.

"I scarcely know what to do," he answered her doubtfully. "Put him across my saddle, poor wretch, I suppose; the fray must be reported."

"Leave that to me," said Cigarette decidedly, and with a certain haughty patronage. "*I* shot him—I will see the thing gets told right. It might be awkward for you; they are growing so squeamish about the *Roumis* killing the natives. Draw him to one side there, and leave him. The crows will finish his affair."

The coolness with which this handsome child disposed of the fate of what, a moment or two before, had been a sentient, breathing, vigorous frame, sent a chill through her hearer, though he had been seasoned by a decade of slaughter.

"No," he said briefly. "Suspicion might fall on some innocent passer-by. Besides—he shall have decent burial."

"Burial for an Arbi—faugh!" cried Cigarette in derision. "Parbleu, M. Bel-à-faire-peur, I have seen hundreds of *our* best lascars lie rotting on the plains with the birds' beaks at their eyes and the jackals' fangs in their flesh. What was good enough for them is surely good enough for him. You are an eccentric fellow—you——"

He laughed a little.

"Time was when I should have begged you not to call me any such 'bad form!' Eccentric! I am not genius enough for that."

"Eh?"—she did not understand him. "Well, you

want that carrion poked into the earth, instead of lying atop of it. I don't see much difference myself. I would like to be in the sun as long as I could, I think, dead or alive. Ah! how odd it is to think one will be dead some day—never wake for the réveillé—never hear the cannon or the caissons roll by—never stir when the trumpets sound the charge, but lie there dead—dead—dead—while the squadrons thunder above one's grave! Droll, eh?"

A momentary pathos softened her voice (which could melt and change into a wonderful music), where she stood in the glistening moonlight. That the time would ever come when her glad laughter would be hushed, when her young heart would beat no more, when the bright, abundant, passionate blood would bound no longer through her veins, when all the vivacious, vivid, sensuous charms of living would be ended for her forever, was a thing that she could no better bring home to her than a bird that sings in the light of the sun could be made to know that the time would come when its little melodious throat would be frozen in death, and give song never more.

The tone touched him—made him think less and less of her as a dare-devil boy, as a reckless child-soldier, and more of her as what she was, than he had done before; he touched her almost caressingly.

"*Pauvre enfant!* I hope that day will be very distant from you. And yet—how bravely you risked death for me just now!"

Cigarette, though accustomed to the lawless loves of the camp, flushed ever so slightly at the mere caress of his hand.

"*Chut!* I risked nothing!" she said rapidly. "As for death—when it comes, it comes. Every soldier carries it in his wallet, and it may jump out on him any

minute. I would rather die young than grow old. Pardi! age is nothing else but death that is *conscious*."

"Where do you get your wisdom, little one?"

"Wisdom? Bah! living is learning. Some people go through life with their eyes shut, and then grumble there is nothing to see in it! Well—you want that Arbi buried? What a fancy! Look you, then! stay by him, since you are so fond of him, and I will go and send some men to you with a stretcher to carry him down to the town. As for reporting, leave that to me; I shall tell them *I* left you on guard. That will square things if you are late at the barrack."

"But that will give you so much trouble, Cigarette."

"Trouble? Morbleu! Do you think I am like that silver pheasant yonder? Lend me your horse, and I shall be in the town in ten minutes!"

She vaulted, as she spoke, into the saddle; he laid his hand on the bridle, and stopped her.

"Wait! I have not thanked you half enough, my brave little champion. How am I to show you my gratitude?"

For a moment the bright, brown, changeful face, that could look so fiercely scornful, so sunnily radiant, so tempestuously passionate, and so tenderly childlike, in almost the same moment, grew warm as the warm suns that had given their fire to her veins; she glanced at him almost slyly, while the moonlight slept lustrously in the dark softness of her eyes; there was an intense allurement in her in that moment—the allurement of a woman's loveliness, bitterly as she disdained a woman's charms. It might have told him, more plainly than words, how best he could reward her for the shot that had saved him; yet, though a man on whom such beguilement usually worked only too easily and too often, it did not now touch him. He was grateful to her, but,

despite himself, he was cold to her; despite himself, the life which that little hand that he held had taken so lightly made it the hand of a comrade to be grasped in alliance, but never the hand of a mistress to steal to his lips and to lie in his breast.

Her rapid and unerring instinct made her feel that keenly and instantly; she had seen too much passion not to know it was absent. The warmth passed off her face, her teeth clinched, she shook the bridle out of his hold.

"Take gratitude to Miladi there! She will value fine words; I set no count on them. I did no more for you than I have done scores of times for my Spahis. Ask them how many I have shot with my own hand!"

In another instant she was away like a sirocco, a whirlwind of dust that rose in the moonlight marking her flight as she rode full gallop down to Algiers.

"A kitten with the tigress in her," thought Cecil as he seated himself on a broken pile of stone to keep his vigil over the dead Arab. It was not that he was callous to the generous nature of the little Friend of the Flag, or that he was insensible either of the courage that beat so dauntlessly in her pulses, or of the piquant, picturesque grace that accompanied even her wildest actions; but she had nothing of her sex's charm for him. He thought of her rather as a young soldier than as a young girl. She amused him as a wayward, bright, mischievous, audacious boy might have done; but she had no other interest for him. He had given her little attention; a waltz, a cigar, a passing jest, were all he had bestowed on the little *lionne* of the Spahis corps; and the deepest sentiment she had ever awakened in him was an involuntary pity—pity for this flower which blossomed on the polluted field of war, and under the poison-dropping branches of lawless

crime. A flower bright-hued, sun-fed, glancing with the dews of youth now, when it had just unclosed, in all its earliest beauty, but already soiled and tainted by the bed from which it sprang, and doomed to be swept away with time, scentless and loveless, down the rapid, noxious current of that broad, black stream of vice on which it now floated so heedlessly.

Even now his thoughts drifted from her almost before the sound of the horse's hoofs had died where he sat on a loose pile of stones, with the lifeless limbs of the Arab at his feet.

"Who was it in my old life that she is like?" he was musing. It was the deep-blue, dreaming, haughty eyes of "Miladi" that he was bringing back to memory, not the brown mignon face that had been so late close to his in the light of the moon.

Meanwhile, on his good gray, Cigarette rode like a true Chasseur herself. She was used to the saddle, and would ride a wild desert colt without stirrup or bridle, balancing her supple form now on one foot, now on the other, on the animal's naked back, while they flew at full speed, with a skill and address that would have distanced the best heroines of manège and hippodrome. Not so fantastically, but full as speedily, she dashed down into the city, scattering all she met with right and left, till she rode straight up to the barracks of the Chasseurs d'Afrique. At the entrance, as she reined up, she saw the very person she wanted, and signed him to her as carelessly as if he were a conscript instead of that powerful officer, François Vireflau, captain and adjutant.

"Holà!" she cried, as she signaled him; Cigarette was privileged all through the army, and would have given the *langue verte* to the Emperor himself, had she met him. "Adjutant Vireflau, I come to tell you a

good story for your *folios matricules*. There is your Corporal there—*le beau Victor*—has been attacked by four drunken dogs of Arbicos, dead drunk, and four against one. He fought them superbly, but he would only parry, not thrust, because he knows how strict the rules are about dealing with the scoundrels—even when they are murdering you, parbleu! He has behaved splendidly. *I* tell you so. And he was so patient with these dogs that he would not have killed one of them. But I did; shot one straight through the brain—a beautiful thing—and he lies on the Oran road now. Victor would not leave him, for fear some passer-by should be thought guilty of a murder; so I came on to tell you, and ask you to send some men up for the jackal's body. Ah! he is a fine soldier, that Bel-à-faire-peur of yours. Why don't you give him a step—two steps—three steps? Diantre! It is not like France to leave him a Corporal!"

Vireflau listened attentively—a short, lean, black-visaged campaigner, who yet relaxed into a grim half-smile as the vivandière addressed him with that air as of a generalissimo addressing a subordinate, which always characterized Cigarette the more strongly the higher the grade of her companion or opponent.

"Always eloquent, pretty one!" he growled. "Are you sure he did not begin the fray?"

"*Ma cantche!* Don't I tell you the four Arabs were like four devils! They knocked down an old colon, and Bel-à-faire-peur tried to prevent their doing more mischief, and they set on him like so many wild-cats. He kept his temper wonderfully; he always tries to preserve order; you can't say so much of your riff-raff, Captain Vireflau, commonly! Here! this is his horse. Send some men to him; and mind the thing is reported fairly, and to his credit, to-morrow."

With which command, given as with the air of a commander-in-chief, in its hauteur and its nonchalance, Cigarette vaulted off the charger, flung the bridle to a soldier, and was away and out of sight before François Vireflau had time to consider whether he should laugh at her caprices, as all the army did, or resent her insolence to his dignity. But he was a good-natured man, and, what was better, a just one; and Cigarette had judged rightly that the tale she had told would weigh well with him to the credit side of his Corporal, and would not reach his Colonel in any warped version that could give pretext for any fresh exercise of tyranny over "Bel-à-faire-peur" under the title of "discipline."

"Dieu de Dieu!" thought his champion as she made her way through the gay-lit streets. "I swore to have my vengeance on him. It is a droll vengeance, to save his life, and plead his cause with Vireflau! No matter! one could not look on and let a set of Arbicos kill a good *lascar* of France, and the thing that is just must be said, let it go as it will against one's grain. Public Welfare before Private Pique!"

A grand and misty generality which consoled Cigarette for an abandonment of her sworn revenge which she felt was a weakness utterly unworthy of her, and too much like that inconsequent weathercock, that useless, insignificant part of creation, those objects of her supreme derision and contempt, those frivolous trifles which she wondered the good God had ever troubled himself to make – namely, "*Les Femmes.*"

"Holà, Cigarette!" cried the Zouave Tata, leaning out of a little casement of the *As de Pique* as she passed it. "*A la bonne heure, ma belle!* Come in; we have the devil's own fun here——"

"No doubt!" retorted the Friend of the Flag. "It

would be odd if the master-fiddler would not fiddle for his own!"

Through the window, and over the sturdy shoulders in their canvas shirt of the hero Tata, the room was visible, full of smoke, through which the lights glimmered like the sun in a fog, reeking with bad wines, crowded with laughing bearded faces, and the battered beauty of women revelers, while on the table, singing with a voice Mario himself could not have rivaled for exquisite sweetness, was a slender Zouave gesticulating with the most marvelous pantomime, while his melodious tones rolled out the obscenest and wittiest ballad that ever was caroled in a guinguette.

"Come in, my pretty one!" entreated Tata, stretching out his brawny arms. "You will die of laughing if you hear Gris-Gris to-night—such a song!"

"A pretty song, yes, for a pig-sty!" said Cigarette, with a glance into the chamber, and she shook his hand off her, and went on down the street. A night or two before a new song from Gris-Gris, the best tenor in the whole army, would have been paradise to her, as she would have vaulted through the window at a single bound into the pandemonium. Now, she did not know why, she found no charm in it.

And she went quietly home to her little straw-bed in her garret, and curled herself up like a kitten to sleep; but for the first time in her young life sleep did not come readily to her, and when it did come, for the first time found a restless sigh upon her laughing mouth, as she murmured, dreaming: "*Comme elle est belle! Comme elle est belle!*"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MISTRESS OF THE WHITE KING.

"FIGHTING in the Kabaila, life was well enough; but here!" thought Cecil as, earlier awake than those of his Chambrée, he stood looking down the lengthy narrow room where the men lay asleep along the bare floor.

Tired as overworked cattle, and crouched or stretched like worn-out homeless dogs, they had never wakened as he had noiselessly harnessed himself, and he looked at them with that interest in other lives that had come to him through adversity; for if misfortune had given him strength, it had also given him sympathy.

They were of marvelously various types—those sleepers brought under one roof by fates the most diverse. Close beside a huge and sinewy brute of an Auvergnât, whose coarse bestial features and massive bull's head were fitter for a galley-slave than a soldier, were the lithe exquisite limbs and the oval delicate face of a man from the Valley of the Rhône. Beneath a canopy of flapping tawny wild-beast skins, the spoils of his own hands, was flung the naked torso of one of the splendid peasants of the Sables d'Olonne; one steeped so long in blood and wine and alcohol, that he had forgotten the blue bright waves that broke on the western shores of his boyhood's home, save when he muttered thirstily in his dreams of the cool sea, as he was muttering now. Next him, curled, doglike, with its round black head meeting its feet, was a wiry frame on which every muscle was traced like network, and the skin burnt black as jet under twenty years of African sun. The midnight

streets of Paris had seen its birth, the thieves' quarter had been its nest; it had no history, it had almost no humanity; it was a perfect machine for slaughter, no more—who had ever tried to make it more?

Further on lay, sleeping fitfully, a boy of scarcely more than seventeen, with rounded cheeks and fair white brow like a child's, whose uncovered chest was delicate as a girl's, and through whose long brown lashes tears in his slumber were stealing as his rosy mouth murmured, "*Mère! mère! Pauvre mère!*" He was a young conscript taken from the glad vine-country of the Loire, and from the little dwelling up in the rock beside the sunny brimming river, and half-buried under its grape-leaves and coils, that was dearer to him than is the palace to its heir. There were many others beside these; and Cecil looked at them with those weary speculative meditative fancies which, very alien to his temperament, stole on him occasionally in the privations and loneliness of his existence here—loneliness in the midst of numbers, the most painful of all solitude.

Life was bearable enough to him in the activity of campaigning, in the excitement of warfare; there were times even when it yielded him absolute enjoyment, and brought him interests more genuine and vivid than any he had known in his former world. But, in the monotony and the confinement of the barrack routine, his days were often intolerable to him. Morning after morning he rose to the same weary round of duty, the same series of petty irritations, of physical privations, of irksome repetitions, to take a toss of black rough coffee, and begin the day knowing it would bring with it endless annoyances without one gleam of hope. Rose to spend hours on the exercise-ground in the glare of a burning sun, railed at if a trooper's accouterments were awry, or an insubordinate scoundrel had pawned his

regulation shirt; to be incessantly witness of tyrannies and cruelties he was powerless to prevent, and which he continually saw undo all he had done, and render men desperate whom he had spent months in endeavoring to make contented; to have as the only diversions for his few instants of leisure loathsome pleasures that disgusted the senses they were meant to indulge, and that brought him to scenes of low debauchery from which all the old fastidious instincts of his delicate luxurious taste recoiled. With such a life as this, he often wondered regretfully why, out of the many Arab swords that had crossed his own, none had gone straight to his heart; why, out of the many wounds that had kept him hovering on the confines of the grave, none had ever brought him the end and the oblivion of death.

Had he been subject to all the miseries and personal hardships of his present career, but had only owned the power to command, to pardon, to lead, and to direct as Alan Bertie before him had done with his Irregular Cavalry in the Indian plains, such a thought would never have crossed him; he was far too thorough a soldier not *then* to have been not only satisfied, but happy. What made his life in the barracks of Algiers so bitter were the impotency, the subjection, the compelled obedience to a bidding that he knew often capricious and unjust as it was cruel, which were so unendurable to his natural pride, yet to which he had hitherto rendered undeviating adhesion and submission, less for his own sake than for that of the men around him, who, he knew, would back him in revolt to the death, and be dealt with, for such loyalty to him, in the fashion that the vivandière's words had pictured with such terrible force and truth.

"Is it worth while to go on with it? Would it not be the wiser way to draw my own saber across my

throat?" he thought, as the brutalized companionship in which his life was spent struck on him all the more darkly because, the night before, a woman's voice and a woman's face had recalled memories buried for twelve long years.

But, after so long a stand-up fight with fate, so long a victory over the temptation to let himself drift out in an opium-sleep from the world that had grown so dark to him, it was not in him to give under now. In his own way he had found a duty to do here, though he would have laughed at any one who should have used the word "duty" in connection with him. In his own way, amid these wild spirits, who would have been blown from the guns' mouths to serve him, he had made good the "Cœur vaillant se fait Royaume" of his House. And he was, moreover, by this time, a French soldier at heart and in habit, in almost all things, though the English gentleman was not dead in him under the harness of a Chasseur d'Afrique.

This morning he roused the men of his Chambrée with that kindly gentleness which had gone so far in its novelty to attach their liking; went through the customary routine of his post with that exactitude and punctuality of which he was always careful to set the example; made his breakfast off some wretched onion-soup and a roll of black bread; rode fifty miles in the blazing heat of the African day at the head of a score of his *chasses-marais* on convoy duty, bringing in escort a long string of maize-wagons from the region of the Kabaila, which, without such guard, might have been swooped down on and borne off by some predatory tribe; and returned, jaded, weary, parched with thirst, scorched through with heat, and covered with white dust, to be kept waiting in his saddle, by his Colonel's orders, outside the barrack for three-quarters of an

hour, whether to receive a command or a censure he was left in ignorance.

When the three-quarters had passed, he was told M. le Commandant had gone long ago, and did not require him!

Cecil said nothing.

Yet he reeled slightly as he threw himself out of saddle; a nausea and a giddiness had come on him. To have passed nigh an hour motionless in his stirrups, with the skies like brass above him, while he was already worn with riding from sunrise well-nigh to sunset, with little to appease hunger and less to slake thirst, made him, despite himself, stagger dizzily under a certain sense of blindness and exhaustion as he dismounted.

The Chasseur who had brought him the message caught his arm eagerly.

"Are you hurt, *mon Caporal?*"

Cecil shook his head. The speaker was one known in the regiment as Petit Picpon, who had begun life as a *gamin* of Paris, and now bade fair to make one of the most brilliant of the soldiers of Africa. Petit Picpon had but one drawback to his military career—he was always in insubordination; the old *gamin* dare-devilry was not dead in him, and never would die; and Petit Picpon accordingly was perpetually a hero in the field and a ragamuffin in the times of peace. Of course he was always arrayed against authority, and now, being fond of his *galonné* with that curious doglike deathless attachment that these natures, all reckless, wanton, destructive, and mischievous though they be, so commonly bestow, he muttered a terrible curse under his fiercely curled moustaches.

"If the Black Hawk were nailed up in the sun like a kite on a barn-door, I would drive twenty nails through his throat!"

Cecil turned rapidly on him.

"Silence, sir! or I must report you. Another speech like that, and you shall have a turn at Beylick."

It went to his heart to rebuke the poor fellow for an outburst of indignation which had its root in regard for himself, but he knew that to encourage it by so much even as by an expression of gratitude for the affection borne him, would be to sow further and deeper the poison-seeds of that inclination to mutiny and that rebellious hatred against their chief already only planted too strongly in the squadrons under Châteauroy's command.

Petit Picpon looked as crestfallen as one of his fraternity could; he knew well enough that what he had said could get him twenty blows of the *matraque*, if his corporal chose to give him up to judgment; but he had too much of the Parisian in him still not to have his say, though he should be shot for it.

"Send me to Beylick if you like, Corporal," he said, sturdily; "I was in wrath for you—not for myself. Diantre!"

Cecil was infinitely more touched than he dared, for sake of discipline, for sake of the speaker himself, to show; but his glance dwelt on Petit Picpon with a look that the quick, black, monkey-like eyes of the rebel were swift to read.

"I know," he said, gravely. "I do not misjudge you; but, at the same time, my name must never serve as a pretext for insubordination. Such men as care to pleasure me will best do so in making my duty light by their own self-control and obedience to the rules of their service."

He led his horse away, and Petit Picpon went on an errand he had been sent to do in the streets for one of the officers. Picpon was unusually thoughtful and sober

in deportment for him, since he was usually given to making his progress along a road, taken unobserved by those in command over him, "*faisant roue*," with hands and heels in the dextrous somersaults of his early days.

Now he went along without any unprofessional antics, biting the tip of a smoked-out cigar, which he had picked up off the pavement in sheer instinct, retained from the old times when he had used to rush in, the foremost of *la queue*, into the forsaken theaters of Bouffes or of Variétés in search for those odds and ends which the departed audience might have left behind them ;—one of the favorite modes of seeking a livelihood with the Parisian night-birds.

"Dame! I will give it up then," resolved Picpon, half aloud, valorously.

Now Picpon had come forth on evil thoughts intent.

His officer—a careless and extravagant man, the richest man in the regiment—had given him a rather small velvet bag, sealed, with directions to take it to a certain notorious beauty of Algiers, whose handsome Moresco eyes smiled—or at least he believed so—exclusively for the time on the sender. Picpon was very quick, intelligent, and much liked by his superiors, so that he was often employed on errands ; and the tricks he played in the execution thereof were so adroitly done that they were never detected. Picpon had chuckled to himself over this mission. It was but the work of an instant for the lithe nimble fingers of the ex-gamin to undo the bag without touching the seal, to see that it contained a hundred Napoléons with a note, to slip the gold into the folds of his *ceinturon*, to fill up the sack with date-stones, to make it assume its original form so that none could have imagined it had been touched, and to proceed with it thus to the Moorish *lionne's*

dwelling. The negro who always opened her door would take it in; Picpon would hint to him to be careful, as it contained some rare and rich sweetmeats; negro nature, he well knew, would impel him to search for the bonbons; and the bag, under his clumsy treatment, would bear plain marks of having been tampered with, and, as the African had a most thievish reputation, he would never be believed if he swore himself guiltless. *Voilà!* here was a neat trick! If it had a drawback, it was that it was too simple, too little *risqué*. A child might do it.

Still—a hundred Naps.! What fat geese, what flagons of brandy, what dozens of wine, what rich soups, what handsome moukieras, what tavern banquets they would bring! Picpon had chuckled again as he arranged the little bag so carefully, with its date-stones, and pictured the rage of the beautiful Moor when she should discover the contents, and order the stick to her negro. Ah! that was what Picpon called fun!

To appreciate the full force of such fun, it is necessary to have also appreciated the *gamin*. To understand the legitimate aspect such a theft bore, it is necessary to have also understood the unrecordable codes that govern the genus *pratique*, into which the genus *gamin*, when at maturity, develops.

Picpon was quite in love with his joke; it was only a good joke in his sight; and, indeed, men need to live as hardly as an African soldier lives, to estimate the full temptation that gold can have when you have come to look on a cat as very good eating, and to have nothing to gnaw but a bit of old shoe-leather through the whole of the long hours of a burning day of fatigue-duty; and to estimate, as well, the full width and depth of the renunciation that made him mutter now so valorously, "*Dame!* I will give it up, then!"

Picpon did not know himself as he said it. Yet he turned down into a lonely narrow lane, under marble walls, overtopped with fig and palm from some fine gardens, undid the bag for the second time, whisked out the date-stones and threw them over the wall, so that they should be out of his reach if he repented, put back the Napoléons, closed the little sack, ran as hard as he could scamper to his destination, delivered his charge into the fair lady's own hands, and relieved his feelings by a score of somersaults along the pavement as fast as ever he could go.

"*Ma cantche!*" he thought, as he stood on his head, with his legs at an acute angle in the air, a position very favored by him for moments of reflection—he said his brain worked better upside down. "*Ma cantche!* what a weakness, what a weakness! What remorse to have yielded to it! Beneath you, Picpon—utterly beneath you. Just because that *ci-devant* says such follies please him in us!"

Picpon (then in his *gamin* stage) had been enrolled in the Chasseurs at the same time with the "*ci-devant*," as they called Bertie, and, following his *gamin* nature, had exhausted all his resources of impudence, maliciousness, and power of tormenting, on the "aristocrat;" somewhat disappointed, however, that the utmost ingenuities of his insolence and even his malignity never succeeded in breaking the "aristocrat's" silence and contemptuous forbearance from all reprisal. For the first two years the hell-on-earth, which life with a Franco-Arab regiment seemed to Cecil, was a hundredfold embittered by the brutalized jests and mosquito-like torments of this little odious chimpanzee of Paris.

One day, however, it chanced that a detachment of Chasseurs, of which Cecil was one, was cut to pieces by such an overwhelming mass of Arabs, that scarce a

dozen of them could force their way through the Bedouins with life; he was among those few, and a flight at full speed was the sole chance of regaining their encampment. Just as he had shaken his bridle free of the Arabs' clutch, and had mowed himself a clear path through their ranks, he caught sight of his young enemy, Picpon, on the ground, with a lance broken off in his ribs, guarding his head, with bleeding hands, as the horses trampled over him. To make a dash at the boy, though to linger a moment was to risk certain death, to send his steel through an Arab who came in his way, to lean down and catch hold of the lad's sash, to swing him up into his saddle and throw him across it in front of him, and to charge afresh through the storm of musket-balls, and ride on thus burdened, was the work of ten seconds with "Bel-à-faire-peur." And he brought the boy safe over a stretch of six leagues in a flight for life, though the imp no more deserved the compassion than a scorpion that has spent all its noxious day stinging at every point of uncovered flesh would merit tenderness from the hand it had poisoned.

When he was swung down from the saddle and laid in front of a vidette fire, sheltered from the bitter north wind that was then blowing cruelly, the bright, black, ape-like eyes of the Parisian *diablotin* opened with a strange gleam in them.

"*Picpon s'en souviendra*," he murmured.

And Picpon had kept his word; he had remembered often, he remembered now, standing on his head and thinking of his hundred Napoléons surrendered because thieving and lying in the regiment gave pain to that oddly prejudiced "ci-devant." This was the sort of loyalty that the Franco-Arabs rendered; this was the sort of influence that the English Guardsman exercised among his Roumis.

Meantime, while Picpon made a human cone of himself, to the admiration of the polyglot crowd of the Algerine street, Cecil himself, having watered, fed, and littered down his tired horse, made his way to a little café he commonly frequented, and spent the few sous he could afford on an iced draught of lemon-flavored drink. Eat he could not; overfatigue had given him a nausea for food, and the last hour, motionless in the intense glow of the afternoon sun, had brought that racking pain through his temples which assailed him rarely now, but which in his first years in Africa had given him many hours of agony. He could not stay in the café; it was the hour of dinner for many, and the odors joined with the noise were insupportable to him.

A few doors farther in the street, which was chiefly of Jewish and Moslem shops, there was a quaint place kept by an old Moor, who had some of the rarest and most beautiful treasures of Algerian workmanship in his long, dark, silent chambers. With this old man Cecil had something of a friendship; he had protected him one day from the mockery and outrage of some drunken Indigènes, and the Moor, warmly grateful, was ever ready to give him a cup of coffee and a hubble-bubble in the stillness of his dwelling. Its resort was sometimes welcome to him as the one spot, quiet and noiseless, to which he could escape out of the continuous turmoil of street and of barrack, and he went thither now. He found the old man sitting cross-legged behind his counter; a noble-looking, aged Mussulman, with a long beard like white silk, with cashmeres and broidered stuffs of peerless texture hanging above his head, and all around him things of silver, of gold, of ivory, of amber, of feathers, of bronze, of emeralds, of ruby, of beryl, whose rich colors glowed through the darkness.

"No coffee, no sherbet, thanks, good father," said Cecil, in answer to the Moor's hospitable entreaties. "Give me only license to sit in the quiet here. I am very tired."

"Sit and be welcome, my son," said Ben Arsli. "Whom should this roof shelter in honor, if not thee? Musjid shall bring thee the supreme solace."

The supreme solace was a narghilé, and its great bowl of rose-water was soon set down by the little Moorish lad at Cecil's side. Whether fatigue really weighted his eyes with slumber, or whether the soothing sedative of the pipe had its influence, he had not sat long in the perfect stillness of the Moor's shop before the narrow view of the street under the awning without was lost to him, the luster and confusion of shadowy hues swam awhile before his eyes, the throbbing pain in his temples grew duller, and he slept—the heavy, dreamless sleep of intense exhaustion.

Ben Arsli glanced at him, and bade Musjid be very quiet. Half an hour or more passed; none had entered the place. The grave old Moslem was half slumbering himself, when there came a delicate odor of perfumed laces, a delicate rustle of silk swept the floor; a lady's voice asked the price of an ostrich-egg, superbly mounted in gold. Ben Arsli opened his eyes—the Chasseur slept on; the new-comer was one of those great ladies who now and then winter in Algeria.

Her carriage waited without; she was alone, making purchase of those innumerable splendid trifles with which Algiers is rife, while she drove through the town in the cooler hour before the sun sank into the western sea.

The Moor rose instantly, with profound salaams, before her, and began to spread before her the richest treasures of his stock. Under plea of the light, he re-

mained near the entrance with her; money was dear to him, and must not be lost, but he would make it if he could without awakening the tired soldier. Marvelous caskets of mother-of-pearl; carpets soft as down, with every brilliant hue melting one within another; coffee equipages, of inimitable metal work; silver statuettes, exquisitely chased and wrought; feather-fans, and screens of every beauty of device, were spread before her, and many of them were bought by her with that unerring grace of taste and lavishness of expenditure which were her characteristics, but which are far from always found in unison; and throughout her survey Ben Arsli had kept her near the entrance, and Cecil had slept on unaroused by the low tones of their voices.

A roll of notes had passed from her hand to the Moslem's, and she was about to glide out to her carriage, when a lamp which hung at the farther end caught her fancy. It was very singular, a mingling of colored glass, silver, gold and ivory being wrought in with much beauty in its formation.

"Is that for sale?" she inquired.

As he answered in the affirmative, she moved up the shop, and, her eyes being lifted to the lamp, had drawn close to Cecil before she saw him. When she did so, she paused near in astonishment.

"Is that soldier asleep?"

"He is, madame," softly answered the old man in his slow, studied French. "He comes here to rest sometimes out of the noise; he was very tired to-day, and I think ill, would he have confessed it."

"Indeed!" Her eyes fell on him with compassion; he had fallen into an attitude of much grace, and of utter exhaustion; his head was uncovered and rested on one arm, so that the face was turned upward. With a woman's rapid, comprehensive glance, she saw the dark

shadow, like a bruise, under his closed, aching eyes, she saw the weary pain upon his forehead, she saw the whiteness of his hands, the slenderness of his wrists, the softness of his hair; she saw, as she had seen before, that whatever he might be now, in some past time he had been a man of gentle blood, of courtly bearing.

"He is a Chasseur d'Afrique?" she asked the Moslem.

"Yes, madame. I think——he must have been something very different some day."

She did not answer; she stood with her thoughtful eyes gazing on the worn-out soldier.

"He saved me once, madame, at much risk to himself, from the savagery of some Turcos," the old man went on. "Of course he is always welcome under my roof. The companionship he has must be bitter to him, I fancy; they do say he would have had his officer's grade, and the cross, too, long before now, if it were not for his Colonel's hatred."

"Ah! I have seen him before now; he carves in ivory. I suppose he has a good sale for those things with you?"

The Moor looked up in amazement.

"In ivory, madame?—*he?* Allah-il-Allah! I never heard of it. It is strange——"

"Very strange. Doubtless you would have given him a good price for them?"

"Surely I would; any price he should have wished. Do I not owe him my life?"

At that moment little Musjid let fall a valuable coffee-tray, inlaid with amber; his master with muttered apology hastened to the scene of accident; the noise startled Cecil, and his eyes unclosed to all the dreamy fantastic colors of the place, and met those bent on him in musing pity—saw that lustrous, haughty, delicate

head bending slightly down through the many-colored shadows.

He thought he was dreaming, yet on instinct he rose, staggering slightly, for sharp pain was still darting through his head and temples.

"Madame! pardon me! Was I sleeping?"

"You were, and rest again. You look ill?" she said, gently, and there was, for a moment, less of that accent in her voice, which the night before had marked so distinctly, so pointedly, the line of demarkation between a Princess of Spain and a soldier of Africa.

"I thank you, I ail nothing."

He had no sense that he did, in the presence of that face which had the beauty of his old life; under the charm of that voice which had the music of his buried years.

"I fear that is scarcely true?" she answered him. "You look in pain; though as a soldier, perhaps, you will not own it?"

"A headache from the sun—no more, madame."

He was careful not again to forget the social gulf which yawned between them.

"That is quite bad enough! Your service must be severe?"

"In Africa, Miladi, one cannot expect indulgence."

"I suppose not. You have served long?"

"Twelve years, madame."

"And your name?"

"Louis Victor." She fancied there was a slight abruptness in the reply, as though he were about to add some other name, and checked himself.

She entered it in the little book from which she had taken her bank-notes.

"I may be able to serve you," she said, as she wrote. "I will speak of you to the Marshal; and when I re-

turn to Paris, I may have an opportunity to bring your name before the Emperor. He is as rapid as his uncle to reward military merit; but he has not his uncle's opportunities for personal observation of his soldiers."

The color flushed his forehead.

"You do me much honor," he said, rapidly, "but if you would gratify me, madame, do not seek to do anything of the kind."

"And why? Do you not even desire the cross?"

"I desire nothing, except to be forgotten"

"You seek what others dread then?"

"It may be so. At any rate, if you would serve me, madame, never say what can bring me into notice."

She regarded him with much surprise, with some slight sense of annoyance; she had bent far in tendering her influence at the French court to a private soldier, and his rejection of it seemed as ungracious as it was inexplicable.

At that moment the Moor joined them.

"Miladi has told me, Monsieur Victor, that you are a first-rate carver of ivories. How is it you have never let me benefit by your art?"

"My things are not worth a sou," muttered Cecil, hurriedly.

"You do them great injustice, and yourself also," said the *grande dame*, more coldly than she had before spoken. "Your carvings are singularly perfect, and should bring you considerable returns."

"Why have you never shown them to me at least?" pursued Ben Arsli—"why not have given me my option?"

The blood flushed Cecil's face again; he turned to the Princess.

"I withheld them, madame, not because he would

have underpriced, but overpriced them. He rates a trifling act of mine, of long ago, so unduly."

She bent her head in silence; yet a more grateful comprehension of his motive she could not have given than her glance alone gave.

Ben Arsli stroked his great beard; more moved than his Moslem dignity would show.

"Always so!" he muttered, "always so! My son, in some life before this, was not generosity your ruin?"

"Miladi was about to purchase that lamp?" asked Cecil, avoiding the question. "Her Highness will not find anything like it in all Algiers."

The lamp was taken down, and the conversation turned from himself.

"May I bear it to your carriage, madame?" he asked, as she moved to leave, having made it her own, while her footman carried out the smaller articles she had bought to the equipage. She bowed in silence; she was very exclusive, she was not wholly satisfied with herself for having conversed thus with a Chasseur d'Afrique in a Moor's bazaar. Still, she vaguely felt pity for this man; she equally vaguely desired to serve him.

"Wait, Monsieur Victor!" she said as he closed the door of her carriage. "I accepted your chessmen last night, but you are very certain that it is impossible I can retain them on such terms."

A shadow darkened his face.

"Let your dogs break them then, madame. They shall not come back to me."

"You mistake—I did not mean that I would send them back. I simply desire to offer you some equivalent for them. There must be something that you wish for?—something which would be acceptable to you in the life you lead?"

"I have already named the only thing I desire."

He had been solicitous to remember and sustain the enormous difference in their social degrees; but at the offer of her gifts, of her patronage, of her recompense, the pride of his old life rose up to meet her own.

"To be forgotten? A sad wish! Nay, surely life in a regiment of Africa cannot be so cloudless that it can create in you no other?"

"It is not. I have another."

"Then tell it to me; it shall be gratified."

"It is to enjoy a luxury long ago lost forever. It is—to be allowed to give the slight courtesy of a gentleman without being tendered the wage of a servant."

She understood him; she was moved, too, by the inflexion of his voice. She was not so cold, not so negligent, as the world called her.

"I had passed my word to grant it; I cannot retract," she answered him, after a pause. "I will press nothing more on you. But—as an obligation to me—can you find no way in which a rouleau of gold would benefit your men?"

"No way that I can take it for them. But, if you care indeed to do them a charity, a little wine, a little fruit, a few flowers (for there are those among them who love flowers), sent to the hospital, will bring many benedictions on your name, madame. They lie in infinite misery there!"

"I will remember," she said simply, while a thoughtful sadness passed over her brilliant face. "Adieu, M. le Caporal; and if you should think better of your choice, and will allow your name to be mentioned by me to his Majesty, send me word through my people. There is my card."

The carriage whirled away down the crooked street; he stood under the tawny awning of the Moorish house,

with the thin glazed card in his hand. On it was printed:

"*Mme. la Princesse Corona d'Amagüe,*
Hôtel Corona, Paris."

In the corner was written, "Villa Aiaussa, Algiers." He thrust it in the folds of his sash, and turned within.

"Do you know her?" he asked Ben Arsli.

The old man shook his head.

"She is the most beautiful of thy many fair Frankish women. I never saw her till to-day. She seemed to have an interest in thee, my son. But listen here. Touching these ivory toys—if thou dost not bring henceforth to me all the work in them that thou doest, thou shalt never come here more to meet the light of her eyes."

Cecil smiled and pressed the Moslem's hand.

"I kept them away because you would have given me a hundred piastres for what had not been worth one. As for her eyes, they are stars that shine on another world than an African trooper's. So best!"

Yet they were stars of which he thought more, as he wended his way back to the barracks, than of the splendid constellations of the Algerian evening that shone with all the luster of the day, but with a soft enchanted light which transfigured sea, and earth, and sky as never did the day's full glow, as he returned to the mechanical duties, to the thankless services, to the distasteful meal, to the riotous mirth, to the coarse comradeship, which seemed to him to-night more bitter than they had ever done since his very identity, his very existence, had been killed and buried past recall, past resurrection, under the *képi d'ordonnance* of a Chasseur d'Afrique.

Meantime, the Princesse Corona drove homeward—homeward to where a temporary home had been made by her in the most elegant of the many snow-white villas that stud the sides of the Sahel and face the bright bow of the sunlit bay; a villa with balconies, and awnings, and cool, silent chambers, and rich, glowing gardens, and a broad, low roof, half hidden in bay and orange and myrtle and basilica, and the liquid sound of waters bubbling beneath a riotous luxuriance of blossom.

Madame la Princesse passed from her carriage to her own morning-room, and sank down on a couch a little listless and weary with her search among the treasures of the Algerine bazaars. It was purposeless work, after all. Had she not bronzes, and porcelains, and bric-à-brac, and *objets d'art* in profusion in her Roman villa, her Parisian hôtel, her great grim palace in Estremadura?

"Not one of those things do I want—not one shall I look at twice. The money would have been better at the soldiers' hospital," she thought, while her eyes dwelt on a chess-table near her—a table on which the mimic hosts of Chasseurs and Arabs were ranged in opposite squadrons.

She took the White King in her hand and gazed at it with a certain interest.

"That man has been noble once," she thought. "What a fate!—what a cruel fate!"

It touched her to great pity; although proud with too intense a pride, her nature was exceedingly generous, and, when once moved, deeply compassionate. The unerring glance of a woman habituated to the first society of Europe had told her that the accent, the bearing, the tone, the features of this soldier, who only asked of life "oblivion," were those of one originally

of gentle blood; and the dignity and patience of his acceptance of the indignities which his present rank entailed on him had not escaped her any more than the delicate beauty of his face as she had seen it, weary, pale, and shadowed with pain, in the unconscious revelation of sleep.

"How bitter his life must be!" she mused. "When Philip comes, perhaps he will know some way to aid him. And yet—who can serve a man who only desires to be forgotten?"

Then, with a certain impatient sense of some absurd discrepancy, of some unseemly occupation, in *her* thus dwelling on the wishes and the burdens of a *sous-officier* of Light Cavalry, she laughed a little, and put the White Chief back once more in his place. Yet even as she set the king among his mimic forces, the very carvings themselves served to retain their artist in her memory.

There was about them an indescribable elegance, an exceeding grace and beauty, which spoke of a knowledge of art and of refinement of taste far beyond those of a mere military amateur in the one who had produced them.

"What could bring a man of that talent, with that address, into the ranks?" she mused. "Persons of good family, of once fine position, come here, they say, and live and die unrecognized under the Imperial flag. It is usually some dishonor that drives them out of their own worlds; it may be so with him. Yet he does not look like one whom shame has touched; he is proud still—prouder than he knows. More likely it is the old, old story—a high name and a narrow fortune—the ruin of thousands! He is French, I suppose; a French aristocrat who has played *au roi dépouillé*, most probably, and buried himself and his history forever beneath those two names that tell one nothing—Louis

Victor. Well, it is no matter of mine. Very possibly he is a mere adventurer with a good manner. This army here is a pot-pourri, they say, of all the varied scoundrelisms of Europe!"

She left the chess-table and went onward to the dressing and bath and bed-chambers, which opened in one suite from her boudoir, and resigned herself to the hands of her attendants for her dinner-toilet.

The Moslem had said aright of her beauty; and now, as her splendid hair was unloosened and gathered up afresh with a crescent-shaped comb of gold that was not brighter than the tresses themselves, the brilliant, haughty, thoughtful face was of a truth, as he had said, the fairest that had ever come from the Frankish shores to the hot African sea board. Many beside the old Moslem had thought it "the fairest that e'er the sun shone on," and held one grave, lustrous glance of the blue imperial eyes above aught else on earth. Many had loved her—all without return. Yet, although only twenty years had passed over her proud head, the Princess Corona d'Amagüe had been wedded and been widowed.

Wedded, with no other sentiment than that of a certain pity and a certain honor for the man whose noble Spanish name she took. Widowed, by a death that was the seal of her marriage-sacrament, and left her his wife only in name and law.

The marriage had left no chain upon her; it had only made her mistress of wide wealth, of that villa on the Sicilian Sea, of that light spacious palace-dwelling in Paris that bore her name, of that vast majestic old castle throned on brown Estremaduran crags, and looking down on mighty woods of cork and chestnut, and flashing streams of falling water hurling through the gorges. The death had left no regret upon her; it

only gave her for awhile a graver shadow over the brilliancy of her youth and of her beauty, and gave her for always—or for so long, at least, as she so chose to use it—a plea for that indifference to men's worship of her which their sex called heartlessness, which her own sex thought an ultra-refined coquetry, and which was in real truth neither the one nor the other, but simply the negligence of a woman very difficult to touch, and, as it had seemed, impossible to charm.

None knew quite aright the history of that marriage. Some were wont to whisper it "ambition;" and, when that whisper came round to her, her splendid lips would curl with as splendid a scorn.

"Do they not know that scarce any marriage can mate *us* equally?" she would ask; for she came of a great Line that thought few royal branches on equality with it; and she cherished as things of strictest creed the legends that gave her race, with its amber hair and its eyes of sapphire blue, the blood of Arthur in their veins.

Of a surety it was not ambition that had allied her, on his death-bed, with Beltran Corona d'Amagüe; but what it was the world could never tell precisely. The world would not have believed it if it had heard the truth—the truth that it had been, in a different fashion, a gleam of something of the same compassion that now made her merciful to a common trooper of Africa which had wedded her to the dead Spanish Prince—compassion which, with many another rich and generous thing, lay beneath her coldness and her pride as the golden stamen lies folded within the white virginal chill cup of the lily.

She had never felt a touch of even passing preference to any one out of the many who had sought her high-born beauty; she was too proud to be easily moved to such selection, and she was far too habituated to homage

to be wrought upon by it ever so slightly. She was of a noble, sun-lit, gracious nature; she had been always happy, always obeyed, always caressed, always adored; it had rendered her immeasurably contemptuous of flattery; it had rendered her a little contemptuous of pain. She had never had aught to regret; it was not possible that she could realize what regret was.

Hence men called and found her very cold; yet those of her own kin whom she loved knew that the heart of a summer rose was not warmer, nor sweeter, nor richer than hers. And first among these was her brother—at once her guardian and her slave—who thought her perfect, and would no more have crossed her will than he would have set his foot on her beautiful imperial head. Corona d'Amagüe had been his friend; the only one for whom he had ever sought to break her unvarying indifference to her lovers, but for whom even he had pleaded vainly until one autumn season, when they had stayed together at a great archducal castle in South Austria. In one of the forest-glades, awaiting the *fanfare* of the hunt, she rejected, for the third time, the passionate supplication of the superb noble who ranked with the D'Ossuna and the Medina-Sidonia. He rode from her in great bitterness, in grief that no way moved her—she was importuned with these entreaties to weariness. An hour after he was brought past her, wounded and senseless; he had saved her brother from imminent death at his own cost, and the tusks of the mighty Styrian boar had plunged through and through his frame, as they had met in the narrow woodland glade.

"He will be a cripple—a paralyzed cripple—for life!" said the one whose life had been saved by his devotion to her that night; and his lips shook a little under his golden beard as he spoke.

She looked at him; she loved him well, and no homage to herself could have moved her as this sacrifice for him had done.

"You think he will live?" she asked.

"They say it is sure. He may live on to old age. But how? My God! what a death in life! And all for my sake, in my stead!"

She was silent several moments; then she raised her face, a little paler than it had been, but with a passionless resolve set on it.

"Philip, *we* do not leave our debts unpaid. Go; tell him I will be his wife."

"His wife—now! Venetia!——"

"Go!" she said, briefly. "Tell him what I say."

"But what a sacrifice! In your beauty, your youth——"

"He did not count cost. Are we less generous? Go—tell him."

He was told; and was repaid. Such a light of unutterable joy burnt through the misty agony of his eyes as never, it seemed to those who saw, had beamed before in mortal eyes. He did not once hesitate at the acceptance of her self-surrender; he only pleaded that the marriage ceremony should pass between them that night.

There were notaries and many priests in the great ducal household; all was done as he desired. She consented without wavering; she had passed her word, she would not have withdrawn it if it had been a thousand times more bitter in its fulfillment. The honor of her house was dearer to her than any individual happiness. This man for them had lost peace, health, joy, strength, every hope of life; to dedicate her own life to him, as he had vainly prayed her when in the full glow and vigor of his manhood, was the only means by which

their vast debt to him could be paid. To so pay it was the instant choice of her high code of honor, and of her generosity that would not be outrun. Moreover, she pitied him unspeakably, though her heart had no tenderness for him; she had dismissed him with cold disdain, and he had gone from her to save the only life she loved, and was stretched a stricken, broken, helpless wreck, with endless years of pain and weariness before him!

At midnight, in the great dim magnificence of the state chamber where he lay, and with the low, soft chanting of the chapel choir from afar echoing through the incensed air, she bent her haughty head down over his couch, and the marriage benediction was spoken over them.

His voice was faint and broken, but it had the thrill of a passionate triumph in it. When the last words were uttered, he lay awhile, exhausted, silent, only looking ever upward at her with his dark, dreamy eyes, in which the old love glanced so strangely through the blindness of pain. Then he smiled as the last echo of the choral melodies died softly on the silence.

"That is joy enough! Ah! have no fear. With the dawn you will be free once more. Did you think that I could have taken your sacrifice? I knew well, let them say as they would, that I should not live the night through. But, lest existence should linger to curse me, to chain you, I rent the linen bands off my wounds an hour ago. All their science will not put back the life *now!* My limbs are dead, and the cold steals up! Ah, love! ah, love! You never thought how men can suffer! But have no grief for me. I am happy. Bend your head down, and lay your lips on mine once. You are my own!—death is sweeter than life!"

And before sunrise he died.

Some shadow from that fatal and tragic midnight marriage rested on her still. Though she was blameless, some vague remorse ever haunted her: though she had been so wholly guiltless of it, this death for her sake ever seemed in some sort of her bringing. Men thought her only colder, only prouder; but they erred. She was one of those women who, beneath the courtly negligence of a chill manner, are capable of infinite tenderness, infinite nobility, and infinite self-reproach.

A great French painter once, in Rome, looking on her from a distance, shaded his eyes with his hand, as if her beauty, like the sun, dazzled him. "Exquisite —superb!" he muttered; and he was a man whose own ideals were so matchless that living women rarely could wring out his praise. "She is nearly perfect, your Princess Corona!"

"Nearly!" cried a Roman sculptor. "What, in Heaven's name, can she want?"

"Only one thing!"

"And that is——?"

"*To have loved.*"

Wherewith he turned into the Greco.

He had found the one flaw—and it was still there. What he missed in her was still wanting.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LITTLE LEOPARD OF FRANCE.

"V'la ce que c'est la gloire—au grabat!"

The contemptuous sentence was crushed through Cigarette's tight-pressed bright-red lips, with an irony sadder than tears. She was sitting on the edge of a *grabat*, hard as wood, comfortless as a truss of straw, and looking down the long hospital-room, with its endless rows of beds and its hot sun shining blindingly on its glaring whitewashed walls.

She was well known and well loved there. When her little brilliant-hued figure fluttered, like some scarlet bird of Africa, down the dreary length of those chambers of misery, bloodless lips, close-clinched in torture, would stir with a smile, would move with a word of welcome. No tender-voiced dove-eyed Sister of Orders of Mercy, gliding gray and soft, and like a living psalm of consolation, beside those couches of misery, bore with them the infinite inexpressible charm that the Friend of the Flag brought to the sufferers. The Sisters were good, were gentle, were valued as they merited by the greatest blackguard prostrate there; but they never smiled, they never took the dying heart of a man back with one glance to the days of his childhood, they never gave a sweet wild snatch of song like a bird's on a spring-blossoming bough that thrilled through half-dead senses, with a thousand voices from a thousand buried hours. "But the Little One," as said a gaunt gray-bearded Zephyr once, where he lay with the death-chill stealing slowly up his jagged, torn frame—"the Little One—do you see—she is youth, she is life; she

is all we have lost. That is her charm! The Sisters are good women, they are very good; but they only *pity* us. The Little One, she *loves* us. That is the difference; do you see?"

It was all the difference—a wide difference; she loved them all, with the warmth and fire of her young heart, for the sake of France and of their common Flag. And though she was but a wild wayward mischievous *gamin*, a *gamin* all over though in a girl's form, men would tell in camp and hospital, with great tears coursing down their brown scarred cheeks, how her touch would lie softly as a snowflake on their heated foreheads, how her watch would be kept by them through long nights of torment, how her gifts of golden trinkets would be sold or pawned as soon as received to buy them ice or wine, and how in their delirium the sweet fresh voice of the child of the regiment would soothe them, singing above their wretched beds some carol or chant of their own native province, which it always seemed she must know by magic; for, were it Basque or Breton, were it a sea-lay of Vendée or a mountain-song of the Orientales, were it a mere ringing rhyme for the mules of Alsace, or a wild bold romanesque from the country of Berri,—Cigarette knew each and all, and never erred by any chance, but ever sung to every soldier the rhythm familiar from his infancy, the melody of his mother's cradle-song and of his first love's lips. And there had been times when those songs suddenly breaking through the darkness of night, suddenly lulling the fiery anguish of wounds, had made the men who one hour before had been like mad dogs, like goaded tigers, men full of the lusts of slaughter and the lust of the senses, and chained powerless and blaspheming to a bed of agony, tremble and shudder at themselves, and turn their faces to the wall and weep

like children, and fall asleep, at length, with wondering dreams of God.

"*V'la ce que c'est la gloire—au grabat!*" said Cigarette, now grinding her pretty teeth. She was in her most revolutionary and reckless mood, drumming the rataplan with her spurred heels, and sitting smoking on the corner of old Miou-Matou's mattress; Miou-Matou, who had acquired that title among the *joyeux* for his scientific powers of making a tomcat into a stew so divine that you could not tell it from rabbit, being laid up with a ball in his hip, a spear-head between his shoulders, a rib or so broken, and one or two other little trifling casualties.

Miou-Matou, who looked very like an old grizzly bear, laughed in the depths of his great hairy chest. "Dream of glory, and end on a grabat! Just so, just so. And yet one has pleasures—to sweep off an Arbico's neck nice and clean—swish!" and he described a circle with his lean brawny arm with as infinite a relish as a dilettante, grown blind, would listen thirstily to the description of an exquisite bit of Faïence or Della Quercia work.

"Pleasures! My God! Infinite, endless misery!" murmured a man on her right hand. He was not thirty years of age, with a delicate, dark, beautiful head that might have passed as model to a painter for a St. John. He was dying fast of the most terrible form of pulmonary maladies.

Cigarette flashed her bright falcon glance over him.

"Well! is it not misery that is glory?"

"We think that it is when we are children. God help us!" murmured the man who lay dying of lung-disease.

"Ouf! Then we think rightly! Glory! Is it the

cross, the star, the bâton? No!* He who wins those runs his horse up on a hill, out of shot range, and watches through his glass how his troops surge up, wave on wave, in the great sea of blood. It is misery that is glory—the misery, that toils with bleeding feet under burning suns without complaint; that lies half-dead through the long night with but one care—to keep the torn flag free from the conqueror's touch; that bears the rain of blows in punishment, rather than break silence and buy release by betrayal of a comrade's trust; that is beaten like the mule, and galled like the horse, and starved like the camel, and housed like the dog, and yet does the thing which is right, and the thing which is brave despite all; that suffers, and endures, and pours out his blood like water to the thirsty sands, whose thirst is never stilled, and goes up in the morning sun to the combat, as though death were paradise that the Arbicos dream, knowing the while, that no paradise waits save the crash of the hoof through the throbbing brain, or the roll of the gun-carriage over the writhing limb. *That* is glory. The misery that is heroism because France needs it, because a soldier's honor wills it. *That* is glory. It is here to-day in the hospital as it never is in the Cour des Prines, where the glittering host of the marshals gather!"

Her voice rang clear as a clarion; the warm blood burnt in her bright cheeks; the swift, fiery, pathetic

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* Having received ardent reproaches from field-officers and commanders of divisions for the injustice done their services by this sentence, I beg to assure them that the sentiment is Cigarette's;—not mine. I should be very sorry for an instant to seem to depreciate that "genius of command," without whose guidance an army is but a rabble, or to underrate that noblest courage which accepts the burden of arduous responsibilities and of duties as bitter in anxiety as they are precious in honor.

eloquence of her nation moved her, and moved strangely the hearts of her hearers; for though she could neither read nor write, there was in Cigarette the germ of that power which the world mistily calls genius.

There were men lying in that sick chamber brutalized, crime-stained, ignorant as the bullocks of the plains, and, like them, reared and driven for the slaughter, yet there was not one among them to whom some ray of light failed to come from those words, through whom some thrill failed to pass as they heard them. Out yonder in the free air, in the barrack-court, or on the plains, the Little One would rate them furiously, mock them mercilessly, rally them with the flat of a saber, if they were mutinous, and lash them with the most pitiless ironies if they were grumbling; but here, in the hospital, the Little One loved them, and they knew it, and that love gave a flute-like music to the passion of her voice.

Then she laughed, and drummed the rataplan again with her brass heel.

"All the same; one is not in paradise *au grabat*, eh, Père Matou?" she said curtly. She was half impatient of her own momentary lapse into enthusiasm, and she knew the temper of her "children" as accurately as a bugler knows the notes of the reveille—knew that they loved to laugh even with the death-rattle in their throats, and with their hearts half breaking over a comrade's corpse, would cry in burlesque mirth, "*Ah, le bon zig! Il a avalé sa cartouche!*" *

"Paradise!" growled Père Matou. "Ouf! Who wants that? If one had a few *bidons* of brandy, now——"

"Brandy? Oh-hé. You are to be much more of

* "Ah, the good fellow! He's swallowed his own cartouche!"

aristocrats now than that!" cried Cigarette, with an immeasurable satire curling on her rosy, piquant lips. The Silver Pheasants have taken to patronize you. *Ma cantche!* if I were you, I would not touch a glass, nor eat a fig; you will not, if you have the spirit of a rabbit. You! Fed like dogs with the leavings of her table—pardieu! that is not for soldiers of France!"

"Eh? What dost thou say?" growled Miou-Matou, peering up under his gray, shaggy brows.

"Only that a *grande dame* has sent you champagne. That is all. Sapristi! how easy it is to play the saint and Samaritan with two wards to one's *maître d'hotel*, and a *rouleau* of gold that one never misses! The rich they can buy all things, you see, even heaven, so cheap!" With which withering satire Cigarette left Père Matou in the conviction that he must be already dead and among the angels if the people began to talk of champagne to him, and flitting down between the long rows of beds with the old disabled veterans who tended them, skimmed her way, like a bird as she was, into another great chamber, filled, like the first, with suffering in all stages and at all years, from the boy-conscript, tossing in African fever, to the white-haired campaigner of a hundred wounds.

Cigarette was as caustic as a Voltaire this morning. Coming through the entrance of the hospital, she had casually heard that Madame la Princesse Corona d'Amagüe had made a gift of singular munificence and mercy to the invalid soldiers—a gift of wine, of fruit, of flowers, that would brighten their long dreary hours for many weeks. Who Madame la Princesse might be she knew nothing; but the title was enough, she was a silver pheasant—bah! And Cigarette hated the aristocrats—when they were of the sex feminine. "An aristocrat in adversity is an eagle," she would say; "but

an aristocrat in prosperity is a peacock." Which was the reason why she flouted glittering young nobles with all the insolence imaginable, but took the part of "Marquise," of "Bel-à-faire-peur," and of such wanderers like them, who had buried their sixteen quarterings under the black shield of the Battalion of Africa. With a word here and a touch there, tender, soft, and bright, since, however ironic her mood, she never brought anything except sunshine to those who lay in such sore need of it, beholding the sun in the heavens only through the narrow chink of a hospital window. At last she reached the bed she came most specially to visit—a bed on which was stretched the emaciated form of a man once beautiful as a Greek dream of a god.

The dews of a great agony stood on his forehead; his teeth were tight clinched on lips white and parched; and his immense eyes, with the heavy circles round them, were fastened on vacancy with the yearning misery that gleams in the eyes of a Spanish bull when it is struck again and again by the matador, and yet cannot die.

She bent over him softly.

"*Tiens, Monsieur Léon!* I have brought you some ice."

His weary eyes turned on her gratefully; he sought to speak, but the effort brought the spasm on his lungs afresh; it shook him with horrible violence from head to foot, and the foam on his auburn beard was red with blood.

There was no one by to watch him; he was sure to die; a week sooner or later—what mattered it? He was useless as a soldier; good only to be thrown into a pit, with some quicklime to hasten destruction and do the work of the slower earthworms.

Cigarette said not a word, but she took out of some

vine-leaves a cold, hard lump of ice, and held it to him; the delicious coolness and freshness in that parching noontide heat stilled the convulsion; his eyes thanked her, though his lips could not; he lay panting, exhausted, but relieved; and she—thoughtfully for her—slid herself down on the floor, and began singing low and sweetly as a fairy might sing on the raft of a water-lily leaf. She sung *quadriales*, to be sure, Béranger's songs and odes of the camp; for she knew of no hymn but the *Marsellaise*, and her chants were all chants like the *Laus Veneris*. But the voice that gave them was pure as the voice of a thrush in the spring, and the cadence of its music was so silvery-sweet that it soothed like a spell all the fever-racked brains, all the pain-tortured spirits.

"Ah! that is sweet," murmured the dying man. "It is like the brooks—like the birds—like the winds in the leaves."

He was but half conscious; but the lulling of that gliding voice brought him peace. And Cigarette sung on, only moving to reach him some fresh touch of ice, while time traveled on, and the first afternoon shadows crept across the bare floor. Every now and then, dimly through the openings of the windows, came a distant roll of drums, a burst of military music, an echo of the laughter of a crowd; and then her head went up eagerly, an impatient shade swept across her expressive face.

It was a fête-day in Algiers; there were flags and banners fluttering from the houses, there were Arab races and Arab manœuvres, there was a review of troops for some foreign general, there were all the mirth and the mischief that she loved, and that never went on without her, and she knew well enough that from mouth to mouth there was sure to be asking, "*Mais où donc*

est Cigarette ?" Cigarette, who was the Generalissima of Africa!

But still she never moved; though all her vivacious life was longing to be out and in their midst, on the back of a desert horse, on the head of a huge drum, perched on the iron support of a high-hung lantern, standing on a cannon while the Horse Artillery swept full gallop, firing down a volley of *argot* on the hot homage of a hundred lovers, drinking creamy liqueurs and filling her pockets with bonbons from handsome subalterns and aides-de-camp, doing as she had done ever since she could remember her first rataplan. But she never moved. She knew that in the general gala these sick-beds would be left more deserted and less soothed than ever. She knew, too, that it was for the sake of this man, lying dying here from the lunge of a Bedouin lance through his lungs, that the ivory wreaths and crosses and statuettes had been sold.

And Cigarette had done more than this ere now many a time for her "children."

The day stole on; Léon Ramon lay very quiet; the ice for his chest and the song for his ear gave him that semi-oblivion, dreamy and comparatively painless, which was the only mercy which could come to him. All the chamber was unusually still; on three of the beds the sheet had been drawn over the face of the sleepers, who had sunk to a last sleep since the morning rose. The shadows lengthened, the hours followed one another; Cigarette sang on to herself with few pauses: whenever she did so pause to lay soaked linen on the soldier's hot forehead, or to tend him gently in those paroxysms that wrenched the clotted blood from off his lungs, there was a light on her face that did not come from the golden heat of the African sun.

Such a light those who know well the Children of

France may have seen, in battle or in insurrection, grow beautiful upon the young face of a conscript or of boy-insurgent as he lifted a dying comrade, or pushed to the front to be slain in another's stead; the face that a moment before had been keen for the slaughter as the eyes of a kite, and recklessly gay as the saucy refrain the lips caroled.

A step sounded on the bare boards; she looked up; and the wounded man raised his weary lids with a gleam of gladness under them; Cecil bent above his couch.

"Dear Léon! how is it with you?"

His voice was softened to infinite tenderness; Léon Ramon had been for many a year his comrade and his friend; an artist of Paris, a man of marvelous genius, of high idealic creeds, who, in a fatal moment of rash despair, had flung his talents, his broken fortunes, his pure and noble spirit, into the fiery furnace of the hell of military Africa; and now lay dying here, a common soldier, forgotten as though he were already in his grave.

"The review is just over. I got ten minutes to spare, and came to you the instant I could," pursued Cecil. "See here what I bring you! You, with your artist's soul, will feel yourself all but well when you look on these!"

He spoke with a hopefulness he could never feel, for he knew that the life of Léon Ramon was doomed; and as the other strove to gain breath enough to answer him, he gently motioned him to silence, and placed on his bed some peaches bedded deep in moss and circled round with stephanotis, with magnolia, with roses, with other rarer flowers still.

The face of the artist-soldier lightened with a longing joy; his lips quivered.

"Ah, God! they have the fragrance of my France!"

Cecil said nothing, but moved them nearer in to the clasp of his eager hands. Cigarette he did not see.

There were some moments of silence, while the dark eyes of the dying man thirstily dwelt on the beauty of the flowers, and his dry ashen lips seemed to drink in their perfumes as those athirst drink in water.

"They are beautiful," he said faintly, at length. "They have our youth in them. How came you by them, dear friend?"

"They are not due to me," answered Cecil, hurriedly. "Madame la Princesse Corona sends them to you. She has sent great gifts to the hospital—wines, fruits, a profusion of flowers, such as those. Through her, these miserable chambers will bloom for awhile like a garden; and the best wines of Europe will slake your thirst in lieu of that miserable *tisane*."

"It is very kind," murmured Léon Ramon, languidly; life was too feeble in him to leave him vivid pleasures in aught. "But I am ungrateful. La Cigarette here,—she has been so good, so tender, so pitiful. For once I have *almost* not missed you!"

Cigarette, thus alluded to, sprang to her feet with her head tossed back, and all her cynicism back again; a hot color was on her cheeks, the light had passed from her face, she struck her white teeth together. She had thought "Bel-à-faire-peur" chained to his regiment in the field of manœuvre, or she would never have come thither to tend his friend. She had felt happy in her self-sacrifice; she had grown into a gentle, pensive, merciful mood, singing here by the side of the dying soldier, and now the first thing she heard was of the charities of Madame la Princesse!

That was all her reward! Cigarette received the recompense that usually comes to generous natures which

have strung themselves to some self-surrender that costs them dear.

Cecil looked at her surprised, and smiled.

"*Ma belle*, is it you? That is, indeed, good. You were the good angel of my life the other night, and to-day come to bring consolation to my friend——"

"'Good angel!' *Chut*, M. Victor! One does not know those *mots sucrés* in Algiers. There is nothing of the angel about me, I hope. Your friend, too! Prut-tut! Do you think I have never been used to taking care of my comrades in hospital before you played the sick-nurse here?"

She spoke with all her brusque petulance in arms again; she hated that he should imagine she had sacrificed her fête-day to Léon Ramon, because the artist-trooper was dear to *him;* she hated him to suppose that she had waited there all the hours through on the chance that *he* would find her at her post, and admire her for her charity. Cigarette was far too proud and disdainful a young soldier to seek either his presence or his praise.

He smiled again; he did not understand the caprices of her changeful moods, and he did not feel that interest in her which would have made him divine the threads of their vagaries.

"I did not think to offend you, my little one," he said, gently. "I meant only to thank you for your goodness to Ramon in my absence."

Cigarette shrugged her shoulders.

"There was no goodness, and there need be no thanks. Ask Père Matou how often I have sat with *him* hours through."

"But on a fête-day! And you who love pleasure, and grace it so well——"

"Ouf! I have had so much of it," said the little one, contemptuously. "It is so tame to *me*. Clouds

of dust, scurry of horses, fanfare of trumpets, thunder of drums, and all for nothing! Bah! I have been in a dozen battles—I—and I am not likely to care much for a sham fight."

"Nay, she is unjust to herself," murmured Léon Ramon. "She gave up the fête to do this mercy—it has been a great one. She is more generous than she will ever allow. Here, Cigarette, look at these scarlet rosebuds; they are like your bright cheeks. Will you have them? I have nothing else to give."

"Rosebuds!" echoed Cigarette, with supreme scorn. "Rosebuds for me? I know no rose but the red of the tricolor; and I could not tell a weed from a flower. Besides, I told Miou-Matou just now, if my children do as *I* tell them, they will not take a leaf or a peach-stone from this *grande dame*—how does she call herself?—Madame Corona d'Amagüe!"

Cecil looked up quickly: "Why not?"

Cigarette flashed on him her brilliant brown eyes with a fire that amazed him.

"Because we are soldiers, not paupers!"

"Surely; but——"

"And it is not for the silver pheasants, who have done nothing to deserve their life but lain in nests of cotton wool, and eaten grain that others sow and shell for them, and spread their shining plumage in a sun that never clouds above their heads, to insult, with the insolence of their 'pity' and their 'charity,' the heroes of France, who perish, as they have lived, for their Country and their Flag!"

It was a superb peroration! If the hapless flowers lying there had been a cartel of outrage to the concrete majesty of the French Army, the Army's champion could not have spoken with more impassioned force and scorn.

Cecil laughed slightly; but he answered, with a certain annoyance:

"There is no 'insolence' here; no question of it. Madame la Princesse desired to offer some gift to the soldiers of Algiers; I suggested to her that to increase the scant comforts of the hospital, and gladden the weary eyes of sick men with beauties that the Executive never dreams of bestowing, would be the most merciful and acceptable mode of exercising her kindness. If blame there be in the matter, it is mine."

In defending the generosity of what he knew to be a genuine and sincere wish to gratify his comrades, he betrayed what he did not intend to have revealed, namely, the conversation that had passed between himself and the Spanish Princess. Cigarette caught at the inference with the quickness of her lightning-like thought.

"Oh-hé! So it is *she!*"

There was a whole world of emphasis, scorn, meaning, wrath, comprehension, and irony in the four monosyllables; the dying man looked at her with languid wonder.

"She? Who? What story goes with these roses?"

"None," said Cecil, with the same inflection of annoyance in his voice; to have his passing encounter with this beautiful patrician pass into a barrack *canard*, through the unsparing jests of the soldiery around him, was a prospect very unwelcome to him. "None whatever. A generous thoughtfulness for our common necessities as soldiers——"

"Ouf!" interrupted Cigarette, before his phrase was one-third finished. "The stalled mare will not go with the wild coursers; an aristocrat may live with us, but he will always cling to his old order. This is the story that runs with the roses. Miladi was languidly insolent

over some ivory chessmen, and Corporal Victor thought it divine, because languor and insolence are the twin gods of the noblesse, parbleu! Miladi, knowing no gods but those two, worships them, and sends to the soldiers of France, as the sort of sacrifice her gods love, fruits and wines that, day after day, are set on her table, to be touched, if tasted at all, with a butterfly's sip; and Corporal Victor finds this a charity sublime;—to give what costs nothing, and scatter a few crumbs out from the profusion of a life of waste and indulgence! And I say, that if my children are of my fashion of thinking, they will choke like dogs dying of thirst rather than slake their throats with alms cast to them as if they were beggars!"

With which fiery and bitter enunciation of her views on the gifts of the Princess Corona d'Amagüe, Cigarette struck light to her *brûle-gueule*, and thrusting it between her lips, with her hands in the folds of her scarlet waist-sash, went off with the light, swift step natural to her, exaggerated into the carriage she had learned of the Zouaves, laughing her good-morrows noisily to this and that trooper as she passed their couches, and not dropping her voice even as she passed the place where the dead lay, but singing, as loud as she could, the most impudent drinking-song out of the taverns of the Spahis that ever celebrated wine, women, and war in the lawlessness of the lingua Sabir.

Her wrath was hot, and her heart heavy within her. She had given up her whole fête-day to wait on the anguish and to soothe the solitude of his friend lying dying there; and her reward had been to hear him speak of this aristocrat's donations, that cost her nothing but the trouble of a few words of command to her household, as though they were the saintly charities of some angel from heaven!

"Diantre!" she muttered, as her hand wandered to the ever-beloved forms of the pistols within her sash. "Chaffaurées or Achmet, or any of them, would throw a draught of wine in his face, and lay him dead for me with a pass or two ten minutes after. Why don't I bid them? I have a mind——"

In that moment she could have shot him dead herself without a second's thought. Storm and sunlight swept, one after another, with electrical rapidity at all times through her vivid, changeful temper; and here she had been wounded and been stung in the very hour in which she had subdued her national love of mirth, and her childlike passion for show, and her impatience of all confinement, and her hatred of all things mournful, to the attainment of this self-negation! Moreover, there mingled with it the fierce and intolerant heat of the passionate and scarce-conscious jealousy of an utterly untamed nature, and of Gallic blood, quick and hot as the streaming springs of the Geyser.

"You have vexed her, Victor," said Léon Ramon, as she was lost to sight through the doors of the great desolate chamber.

"I hope not; I do not know how," answered Cecil. "It is impossible to follow the windings of her wayward caprices. A child—a soldier—a dancer—a brigand—a spoilt beauty—a mischievous gamin—how is one to treat such a little fagot of opposites?"

The other smiled.

"Ah! you do not know the Little One yet. She is worth a study. I painted her years ago—'La Vivandière à Sept Ans.' There was not a picture in the Salon that winter that was sought like it. I had traveled in Algeria then; I had not entered the army. The first thing I saw of Cigarette was this: She was seven years old; she had been beaten black and blue; she had had

two of her tiny teeth knocked out. The men were furious, she was a pet with them; and she would not say who had done it, though she knew twenty swords would have beaten him flat as a fritter if she had given his name. I got her to sit to me some days after. I pleased her with her own picture. I asked her to tell me why she would not say who had ill treated her. She put her head on one side like a robin, and told me, in a whisper: 'It was one of my comrades—because I would not steal for him. I would not have the army know—it would demoralize them. If a French soldier ever does a cowardly thing, another French soldier must not betray it.' That was Cigarette—at seven years. The esprit du corps was stronger than her own wrongs. What do you say to that nature?"

"That it is superb!—that it might be moulded to anything. The pity is——"

"Ah, *tais-toi!*" said the artist-trooper, half wearily, half laughingly. "Spare me the old world-worn, threadbare formulas. Because the flax and the laleza blossom for use, and the garden-flowers grow trained and pruned, must there be no bud that opens for mere love of the sun, and swings free in the wind in its fearless fair-fashion? Believe me, dear Victor, it is the lives which follow no previous rule that do the most good and give the most harvest."

"Surely. Only for this child—a woman—in her future——"

"Her future? Well, she will die, I dare say, some bright day or another, at the head of a regiment, with some desperate battle turned by the valor of her charge, and the sight of the torn tricolor upheld in her little hands. That is what Cigarette hopes for—why not? There will always be a million of commonplace women ready to keep up the decorous traditions of their sex,

and sit in safety over their needles by the side of their hearths. One little lioness here and there in a generation cannot do overmuch harm."

Cecil was silent. He would not cross the words of the wounded man by saying what might bring a train of less pleasant thoughts—saying what, in truth, was in his mind, that the future which he had meant for the little Friend of the Flag was not that of any glorious death by combat, but that of a life (unless no bullet early cut its silver cord in twain) when youth should have fled, and have carried forever with it her numberless graces, and left in its stead that ribaldry-stained, drink-defiled, hardened, battered, joyless, cruel, terrible thing which is unsightly and repugnant to even the lowest among men, which is as the lees of the drunk wine, as the ashes of the burnt-out fires, as the discord of the broken and earth-clogged lyre.

Cigarette was charming now—a fairy-story set into living motion—a fantastic little firework out of an extravaganza, with the impudence of a boy-harlequin and the witching kittenhood of a girl's beauty. But when this youth that made it all fair should have passed (and youth passes soon when thus adrift on the world), when there should be left in its stead only shamelessness, hardihood, vice, weariness—those who found the prettiest jest in her now would be the first to cast aside, with an oath, the charred wrecked rocket-stick of a life from which no golden careless stream of many-colored fires of coquette caprices would rise and enchant them then.

"Who is it that sent these?" asked Léon Ramon, later on, as his hands still wandered among the flowers: for the moment he was at peace; the ice and the hours of quietude had calmed him.

Cecil told him again.

"What does Cigarette know of her?" he pursued.

"Nothing, except, I believe, she knew that Madame Corona accepted my chess-carvings."

"Ah! I thought the Little One was jealous, Victor."

"Jealous? Pshaw! Of whom?"

"Of any one you admire—especially of this *grande dame*."

"Absurd!" said Cecil, with a sense of annoyance. "Cigarette is far too bold a little trooper to have any thoughts of those follies; and as for this *grande dame*, as you call her, I shall, in every likelihood, never see her again—unless when the word is given to 'Carry Swords' or 'Lances' at the General's Salute, where she reins her horse beside M. le Maréchal's at a review, as I have done this morning."

The keen ear of the sick man caught the inflection of an impatience, of a mortification, in the tone that the speaker himself was unconscious of. He guessed the truth—that Cecil had never felt more restless under the shadow of the Eagles than he had done when he had carried his sword up in the salute as he passed with his regiment the flagstaff where the aristocracy of Algiers had been gathered about the Marshal and his staff, and the azure eyes of Madame la Princesse had glanced carelessly and critically over the long line of gray horses of those Chasseurs d'Afrique among whom he rode a *bas-officier*.

"Cigarette is right," said Ramon, with a slight smile. "Your heart is with your old order. You are '*aristocrat au bout des ongles*.'"

"Indeed I am not, *mon ami*; I am a mere trooper."

"Now! Well, keep your history as you have always done, if you will. What my friend was matters nothing; I know well what he is, and how true a friend.

As for Miladi, she will be best out of your path, Victor. Women! God!—they are so fatal!"

"Does not our folly make their fatality?"

"Not always; not often. The madness may be ours, but they sow it. Ah! do they not know how to rouse and enrage it; how to fan, to burn, to lull, to pierce, to slake, to inflame, to entice, to sting? Heavens! so well they know—that their beauty must come, one thinks, out of hell itself!"

His great eyes gleamed like fire, his hollow chest panted for breath, the sweat stood out on his temples. Cecil sought to soothe him, but his words rushed on with the impetuous course of the passionate memories that arose in him.

"Do you know what brought me here? No! As little as I know what brought you, though we have been close comrades all these years. Well, it was *she!* I was an artist. I had no money, I had few friends; but I had youth, I had ambition, I had, I think, genius, till she killed it. I loved my art with a great love, and I was happy. Even in Paris one can be so happy without wealth, while one is young. The mirth of the Barrière—the grotesques of the Halles—the wooden booths on New Year's Day—the bright midnight crowds under the gaslights—the bursts of music from the gay cafés—the gray little nuns flitting through the snow—the Mardi Gras and the Old-World fooleries—the summer Sundays under the leaves while we laughed like children—the silent dreams through the length of the Louvre—dreams that went home with us and made our garret bright with their visions—one was happy in them—happy, happy!"

His eyes were still fastened on the blank white wall before him while he spoke, as though the things that his words sketched so faintly were painted in all their

vivid colors on the dull blank surface. And so in truth they were, as remembrance pictured all the thousand perished hours of his youth.

"Happy—until she looked at me," he pursued, while his voice flew in feverish haste over the words. "Why would she not let me be? She had them all in her golden nets; nobles, and princes, and poets, and soldiers, she swept them in far and wide. She had her empire; why must she seek out a man who had but his art and his youth, and steal *those?* Women are so insatiate, look you; though they held all the world, they would not rest if one mote in the air swam in sunshine free of them! It was the first year I touched triumph that I saw her. They began for the first time to speak of me; it was the little painting of Cigarette, as a child of the army, that did it. Ah, God! I thought myself already so famous! Well, she sent for me to take her picture, and I went. I went and I painted her as Cleopatra—by her wish. Ah! it was a face for Cleopatra—the eyes that burn your youth dead, the lips that kiss your honor blind! A face—my God! how beautiful! She had set herself to gain my soul; and as the picture grew, and grew, and grew, so my life grew into hers till I lived only by her breath. Why did she want my life? she had so many! She had rich lives, great lives, grand lives at her bidding; and yet she knew no rest till she had leaned down from her cruel height and had seized mine, that had nothing on earth but the joys of the sun and the dew, and the falling of night, and the dawning of day, that are given to the birds of the fields."

His chest heaved with the spasms that with each throe seemed to tear his frame asunder; still he conquered them, and his words went on, his eyes fastened on the burning white glare of the wall as though all the beauty of this woman glowed afresh there to his sight.

"She was great; no matter her name, she lives still. She was vile; ay, but not in my sight till too late. Why is it that men never love so well as where they love their own ruin? that the heart which is pure never makes ours beat upon it with the rapture sin gives? Through month on month my picture grew, and my passion grew with it, fanned by her hand. She knew that never would a man paint her beauty like one who gave his soul for the price of success. I had my paradise; I was drunk; and I painted as never the colors of mortals painted a woman. I think even she was content; even she, who in her superb arrogance thought she was matchless and deathless. Then came my reward; when the picture was done, her fancy had changed! A light scorn, a careless laugh, a touch of her fan on my cheek; could I not understand? Was I still such a child? Must I be broken more harshly in to learn to give place? That was all! and at last her lackey pushed me back with his wand from her gates! What would you? I had not known what a great lady's illicit caprices meant; I was still but a boy! She had killed me; she had struck my genius dead; she had made earth my hell—what of that? She had her beauty eternal in the picture she needed, and the whole city rang with her loveliness as they looked on my work. I have never painted again. I came here. What of that? An artist the less then, the world did not care; a life the less soon, she will not care either!"

Then, as the words ended, a great wave of blood beat back his breath and burst from the pent-up torture of his striving lungs, and stained red the dark and silken masses of his beard. His comrade had seen the hemorrhage many times, yet now he knew, as he had never known before, that this was death.

As he held him upward in his arms, and shouted

loudly for help, the great luminous eyes of the French soldier looked up at him through their mist with the deep, fond gratitude that beams in the eyes of a dog as it drops down to die, knowing one touch and one voice to the last.

"*You* do not forsake," he murmured brokenly, while his voice ebbed faintly away as the stream of his life flowed faster and faster out. "It is over now,—so best! If only I could have seen France once more. France——"

He stretched his arms outward as he spoke with the vain longing of a hopeless love. Then a deep sigh quivered through his lips; his hand strove to close on the hand of his comrade, and his head fell, resting on the flushed blossoms of the rosebuds of Provence.

He was dead.

* * * * * *

An hour later Cecil left the hospital, seeing and hearing nothing of the gay riot of the town about him, though the folds of many-colored silk and bunting fluttered across the narrow Moorish streets, and the whole of the populace was swarming through them with the vivacious enjoyment of Paris mingling with the stately picturesque life of Arab habit and custom. He was well used to pain of every sort; his bread had long been the bread of bitterness, and the waters of his draught been of gall. Yet this stroke, though looked for, fell heavily and cut far.

Yonder, in the dead-room, there lay a broken, useless mass of flesh and bone that in the sight of the Bureau Arabe was only a worn-out machine that had paid its due toll to the wars of the Second Empire, and was now valueless; only fit to be cast in to rot, unmourned, in the devouring African soil. But to him that lifeless, useless mass was dear still; was the wreck

of the bravest, tenderest, and best-beloved friend that he had found in his adversity.

In Léon Ramon he had found a man whom he had loved, and who had loved him. They had suffered much, and much endured together; their very dissimilarities had seemed to draw them nearer to each other. The gentle impassiveness of the Englishman had been like rest to the ardent impetuosity of the French soldier; the passionate and poetic temperament of the artist-trooper had revealed to Cecil a thousand views of thought and of feeling which had never before then dawned on him. And now that the one lay dead, a heavy, weary sense of loneliness rested on the other. They died around him every day; the fearless, fiery blood of France watered in ceaseless streams the arid, harvestless fields of northern Africa; death was so common, that the fall of a comrade was no more noted by them than the fall of a loose stone that their horse's foot shook down a precipice. Yet this death was very bitter to him; he wondered with a dull sense of aching impatience why no Bedouin bullet, no Arab saber, had ever found his own life out, and cut his thralls asunder.

The evening had just followed on the glow of the day—evening, more lustrous even than ever, for the houses were all a-glitter with endless lines of colored lamps and strings of sparkling illuminations, a very sea of bright-hued fire. The noise, the mirth, the sudden swell of music, the pleasure-seeking crowds, all that were about him, served only to make more desolate and more oppressive by their contrast his memories of that life, once gracious, and gifted, and content with the dower of its youth, ruined by a woman, and now slaughtered here, for no avail and with no honor, by a lance-thrust in a midnight-skirmish, which had been

unrecorded even in the few lines of the gazette that chronicled the war-news of Algeria.

Passing one of the cafés, a favorite resort of the officers of his own regiment, he saw Cigarette. A sheaf of blue, and white, and scarlet lights flashed with tongues of golden flame over her head, and a great tricolor flag with the brass eagle above it, was hanging in the still, hot air from the balcony from which she leaned. Her tunic-skirt was full of bonbons and crackers that she was flinging down among the crowd while she sang, stopping every now and then to exchange some passage of *gaulois* wit with them that made her hearers scream with laughter, while behind her was a throng of young officers drinking champagne, eating ices, and smoking, echoing her songs and her satires with enthusiastic voices and stamps of their spurred boot-heels. As he glanced upward, she looked literally in a blaze of luminance, and the wild, mellow tones of her voice ringing out in the "*Rien n'est sacré pour un Sapeur,*" sounded like a mockery of that dying-bed beside which they had both so late stood together.

"She has the playfulness of the young leopard, and the cruelty," he thought, with a sense of disgust, forgetting that she did not know what he knew, and that if Cigarette had waited to laugh until death had passed by she would have never laughed all her life through in the battalions of Africa.

She saw him, as he went beneath her balcony; and she sung all the louder, she flung her sweetmeat missiles with the reckless force of a Roman Carnivalist, she launched bolts of tenfold more audacious raillery at the delighted mob below. Cigarette was "*bon soldat;*" when she was wounded, she wound her scarf round the nerve that ached, and only laughed the gayer.

And he did her that injustice which the best among

us are apt to do to those whom we do not feel interest enough in to study with that closeness which can alone give comprehension of the intricate and complex rebus, so faintly sketched, so marvelously involved, of human nature.

He thought her a little leopard, in her vivacious play and her inborn blood-thirstiness.

Well, the little leopard of France played recklessly enough that evening. Algiers was *en fête*, and Cigarette was sparkling over the whole of the town like a humming-bird or a firefly—here and there, and everywhere, in a thousand places at once, as it seemed; staying long with none, making music and mirth with all. Waltzing like a thing possessed, pelting her lovers with a tempest storm of dragées, standing on the head of a gigantic Spahi *en tableau* amid a shower of fireworks, improvising slang songs worthy of Jean Vadé and his Poissardes, and chorused by a hundred lusty lungs that yelled the burden in riotous glee as furiously as they were accustomed to shout "En avant!" in assault and in charge, Cigarette made amends to herself at night for her vain self-sacrifice of the fête-day.

She had her wound; yes, it throbbed still now and then, and stung like a bee in the warm core of a rose. But she was young, she was gay, she was a little philosopher, above all she was French, and in the real French blood happiness runs so richly that it will hardly be utterly chilled until the veins freeze in the coldness of death. She enjoyed—enjoyed all the more fiercely, perhaps, because a certain desperate bitterness mingled with the abandonment of her Queen Mab-like revelries. Until now Cigarette had been as absolutely heedless and without a care as any young bird taking its first summer circles downward through the intoxication of the sunny air. It was not without fiery resistance and

scornful revolt that the madcap Figlia del Reggimento would be prevailed on to admit that any shadow could have power to rest on her.

She played through more than half the night, the agile bounding graceful play of the young leopard to which he had likened her, and with a quick punishment from her velvet-sheathed talons if any durst offend her. Then when the dawn was nigh, leopard-like, the Little One sought her den.

She was most commonly under canvas; but when she was in the town it was at one with the proud independence of her nature that she rejected all offers made her, and would have her own nook to live in, even though she were not there one hour out of the twenty-four.

"Le Château de Cigarette" was a standing jest of the Army; for none was ever allowed to follow her thither, or to behold the interior of her fortress, and one overventurous Spahi scaling the ramparts had been rewarded with so hot a deluge of lentile soup from a boiling casserole poured on his head from above, that he had beaten a hasty and ignominious retreat, which was more than a whole tribe of the most warlike of his countrymen could ever have made him do.

"Le Château de Cigarette" was neither more nor less than a couple of garrets, high in the air, in an old Moorish house, in an old Moorish court, decayed, silent, poverty-struck, with the wild pumpkin thrusting its leaves through the broken fretwork, and the green lizard shooting over the broad pavements, once brilliant in mosaic, that the robes of the princes of Islam had swept, now carpeted deep with the dry white drifted dust, and only crossed by the tottering feet of aged Jews or the laden steps of Algerine women.

Up a long winding rickety stair Cigarette approached

her castle, which was very near the sky indeed. "I like the blue," said the châtelaine laconically, "and the pigeons fly close by my window." And through it, too, she might have added, for though no human thing might invade her château, the pigeons circling in the sunrise light always knew well there were rice and crumbs spread for them in that eyelet-hole of a casement.

Cigarette threaded her agile way up the dark ladder-like shaft, and opened her door. There was a dim oil wick burning; the garret was large, and as clean as a palace could be; its occupants were various, and all sound asleep except one, who, rough, and hard, and small, and three legged, limped up to her and rubbed a little bullet head against her lovingly.

"Bouffarick—p'tit Bouffarick!" returned Cigarette, caressingly, in a whisper, and Bouffarick, content, limped back to a nest of hay, being a little wiry dog that had lost a leg in one of the most famous battles of Oran, and lain in its dead master's breast through three days and nights on the field. Cigarette, shading the lamp with one hand, glanced round on her family.

They had all histories—histories in the French Army, which was the only history she considered of any import to the universe. There was a raven perched high, by name Vole-qui-Veut; he was a noted character among the Zouaves, and had made many a campaign riding on his owner's bayonet; he loved a combat, and was specially famed for screaming "*Tue! tue! tue!*" all over a battle-field; he was very gray now, and the Zouave's bones had long bleached on the edge of the desert.

There was a tame rat who was a *vieille moustache*, and who had lived many years in a Lignard's pocket, and munched waifs and strays of the military rations,

until the enormous crime being discovered that it was taught to sit up and dress its whiskers to the heinous air of the *Marseillaise*, the Lingard got the *matraque*, and the rat was condemned to be killed, had not Cigarette dashed in to the rescue and carried the long-tailed revolutionist off in safety.

There was a big white cat curled in a ball, who had been the darling of a Tringlo, and had traveled all over North Africa on the top of his mule's back, seven seasons through; in the eighth the Tringlo was picked off by a flying shot, and an Indigène was about to skin the shrieking Boule Blanche for the soup-pot, when a bullet broke his wrist, making him drop the cat with a yell of pain, and the Friend of the Flag, catching it up, laughed in his face, "A lead comfit instead of slaughter-soup, my friend!"

There was little Bouffarick and three other brother-dogs of equal celebrity, one, in especial, who had been brought from Châlons, in defiance of the regulations, inside the drum of his regiment, and had been wounded a dozen times, always seeking the hottest heat of the skirmish. And there was, besides these, sleeping serenely on a straw palliasse, a very old man with a snowy beard and a head fit for Gerome to give to an Abraham.

A very old man—one who had been a conscript in the bands of Young France, and marched from his Pyrennéan village to the battle tramp of the Marseillaise, and charged with the Enfans de Paris across the plains of Gemappes; who had known the passage of the Alps, and lifted the long curls from the dead brow of Désaix, at Marengo, and seen in the sultry noonday dust of a glorious summer the Guard march into Paris, while the people laughed and wept with joy, surging like the mighty sea around one pale frail form, so young by years, so absolute by genius.

A very old man; long broken with poverty, with pain, with bereavement, with extreme old age; and, by a long course of cruel accidents, alone, here in Africa, without one left of the friends of his youth, or of the children of his name, and deprived even of the charities due from his country to his services—alone save for the little Friend of the Flag who, for four years, had kept him on the proceeds of her wine trade, in this Moorish attic, tending him herself when in town, taking heed that he should want for nothing when she was campaigning.

"I will have a care of him," she had said, curtly, when she had found him in great misery and learned his history from others; and she had had the care accordingly, maintaining him at her own cost in the Moorish building, and paying a good Jewess of the quarter to tend him when she was not herself in Algiers.

The old man was almost dead, mentally, though in bodily strength still well able to know the physical comforts of food, and rest, and attendance; he was in his second childhood, in his ninetieth year, and was unconscious of the debt he owed her; even, with a curious caprice of decrepitude, he disliked her, and noticed nothing except the raven when it shrieked its "*Tue! tue! tue!*" But to Cigarette he was as sacred as a god; had he not fought beneath the glance, and gazed upon the face, of the First Consul?

She bent over him now, saw that he slept, busied herself noiselessly in brewing a little tin pot full of coffee and hot milk, set it over the lamp to keep it warm, and placed it beside him ready for his morning meal, with a roll of white wheat bread; then, with a glance round to see that her other dependants wanted for nothing, went to her own garret adjoining, and with the lattice fastened back, that the first rays of sunrise and the first

white flash of her friends the pigeons' gleaming wings might awaken her, threw herself on her straw and slept with all the graceful careless rest of the childhood which though in one sense she had never known, yet in another had never forsaken her.

She hid as her lawless courage would not have stooped to hide a sin, had she chosen to commit one, this compassion which she, the young condottiera of Algeria, showed with so tender a charity to the soldier of Bonaparte. To him, moreover, her fiery imperious voice was gentle as the dove, her wayward dominant will was pliant as the reed, her contemptuous skeptic spirit was reverent as a child's before an altar. In her sight the survivor of the Army of Italy was sacred; sacred the eyes which, when full of light, had seen the sun glitter on the breastplates of the Hussars of Murat, the Dragoons of Kellerman, the Cuirassiers of Milhaud; sacred the hands which, when nervous with youth, had borne the standard of the Republic victorious against the gathered Teuton host in the Thermopylæ of Champagne; sacred the ears which, when quick to hear, had heard the thunder of Arcola, of Lodi, of Rivoli, and, above even the tempest of war, the clear still voice of Napoleon; sacred the lips which, when their beard was dark in the fullness of manhood, had quivered, as with a woman's weeping, at the farewell, in the spring night, in the moonlit Cour des Adieux.

Cigarette had a religion of her own; and followed it more closely than most disciples follow other creeds.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"MILADI AUX BEAUX YEUX BLEUS."

Early that morning, when the snowy cloud of pigeons were circling down to take their daily alms from Cigarette, where her bright brown face looked ont from the lattice hole, Cecil with some of the rough riders of his regiment was sent far into the interior to bring in a string of colts, bought of a friendly desert tribe, and destined to be shipped to France for the Imperial Haras. The mission took two days; early on the third day they returned with the string of wild young horses, whom it had taken not a little exertion and address to conduct successfully through the country into Algiers.

He was usually kept in incessant activity, because those in command over him had quickly discovered the immeasurable value of a *bas-officier* who was certain to enforce and obtain implicit obedience, and certain to execute any command given him with perfect address and surety, yet who, at the same time, was adored by his men, and had acquired a most singularly advantageous influence over them. But of this he was always glad; throughout his twelve years' service under the Emperor's flag, he had only found those moments in which he was unemployed intolerable; he would willingly have been in the saddle from dawn till midnight.

Châteauroy was himself present when the colts were taken into the stable-yard; and himself inquired, without the medium of any third person, the whole details of the sale and of the transit. It was impossible, with all his inclination, to find any fault either with the

execution of the errand or with the brief respectful answers by which his corporal replied to his rapid and imperious cross-questionings. There were a great number of men within hearing, many of them the most daring and rebellious *pratiques* of the regiment; and Cecil would have let the coarsest upbraidings scourge him, rather than put the temptation to mutiny in their way which one insubordinate or even not strictly deferential word from him would have given. Hence the inspection passed off peaceably; as the Marquis turned on his heel, however, he paused a moment.

"Victor!"

"*Mon Commandant?*"

"I have not forgotten your insolence with those ivory toys. But Madame la Princesse herself has deigned to solicit that it shall be passed over unpunished. She cannot, of course, yield to your impertinent request to remain also unpaid for them. I charged myself with the fulfillment of her wishes. You deserve the *matraque*, but since Miladi herself is lenient enough to pardon you, you are to take this instead. Hold your hand, sir!"

Cecil put out his hand; he expected to receive a heavy blow from his commander's saber, that possibly might break the wrist. These little trifles were common in Africa.

Instead, a *rouleau* of Napoléons was laid on his open palm. Châteauroy knew the gold would sting more than the blow.

For the moment Cecil had but one impulse—to dash the pieces in the giver's face. In time to restrain the impulse, he caught sight of the wild eager hatred gleaming in the eyes of Rake, of Petit Picpon, of a score of others who loved him and cursed their Colonel, and would at one signal from him have sheathed their

swords in the mighty frame of the Marquis, though they should have been fired down the next moment themselves for the murder. The warning of Cigarette came to his memory; his hand clasped on the gold; he gave the salute calmly as Châteauroy swung himself away.

The troops looked at him with longing questioning eyes; they knew enough of him by now to know the bitterness such gold, so given, had for him. Any other, even a corporal, would have been challenged with a storm of raillery, a volley of congratulation, and would have had shouted or hissed after him opprobrious accusations of "*faisant suisse*" if he had not forthwith treated his comrades royally from such largesse. With Bel-à-faire-peur they held their peace, they kept the silence which they saw that he wished to keep, as, his hour of liberty being come, he went slowly out of the great court with the handful of Napoléons thrust in the folds of his sash.

Rather unconsciously than by premeditation his steps turned through the streets that led to his old familiar haunt, the *As de Pique*, and dropping down on a bench under the awning, he asked for a draught of water. It was brought him at once, the hostess, a quick brown little woman from Paris, whom the lovers of Eugène Sue called Rigolette, adding of her own accord a lump of ice and a slice or two of lemon, for which she vivaciously refused payment, though generosity was by no means her cardinal virtue.

"Bel-à-faire-peur" awakened general interest through Algiers; he brought so fiery and so daring a reputation with him from the wars and raids of the interior, yet he was so calm, so grave, so gentle, so listless; it was known that he had made himself the terror of Kabyle and Bedouin, yet here in the city he thanked the negro boy who took him a glass of lemonade at an estaminet,

and sharply rebuked one of his men for knocking down an old colon with a burden of gourds and of melons; such a Roumi as this the good people of the Franco-African capital held as a perfect gift of the gods, and not understanding one whit, nevertheless fully appreciated.

He did not look at the newspapers she offered him; but sat gazing out from the tawny awning, like the sail of a Neapolitan felucca, down the checkered shadows and the many-colored masses of the little crooked, rambling, semi-barbaric alley. He was thinking of the Napoléons in his sash and of the promise he had pledged to Cigarette. That he would keep it he was resolved. The few impressive vivid words of the young vivandière had painted before him like a picture the horrors of mutiny and its hopelessness; rather than that, through him, these should befall the men who had become his brethren-in-arms, he felt ready to let the Black Hawk do his worst on his own life. Yet a weariness, a bitterness, he had never known in the excitement of active service came on him, brought by this sting of insult brought from the fair hand of an *aristocrate*.

There was absolutely no hope possible in his future. The uttermost that could ever come to him would be a grade something higher in the army that now enrolled him; the gift of the cross, or a post in the bureau. Algerine warfare was not like the campaigns of the armies of Italy or the Rhine, and there was no Napoléon here to discern with unerring omniscience a leader's genius under the képi of a common trooper. Though he should show the qualities of a Massena or a Kléber, the chances were a million to one that he would never get even so much as a lieutenancy; and the raids on the decimated tribes, the obscure skirmishes of the interior, though terrible in slaughter and venturesome

enough, were not the fields on which great military successes were won and great military honors acquired. The French fought for a barren strip of brown plateau that, gained, would be of little use or profit to them; he thought that he did much the same, that his future was much like those arid sand-plains, those thirsty verdureless stretches of burnt earth—very little worth the reaching.

The heavy folds of a Bedouin's haick, brushing the papers off the bench, broke the thread of his musings. As he stooped for them, he saw that one was an English journal some weeks old. His own name caught his eye—the name buried so utterly, whose utterance in the Sheik's tent had struck him like a dagger's thrust. The flickering light and darkness, as the awning waved to and fro, made the lines move dizzily upward and downward as he read—read the short paragraph touching the fortunes of the race that had disowned him:

"The Royallieu Succession.—We regret to learn that the Right Hon. Viscount Royallieu, who so lately succeeded to the family title on his father's death, has expired at Mentone, whither his health had induced him to go some months previous. The late Lord was unmarried. His next brother was, it will be remembered, many years ago, killed on a southern railway. The title, therefore, now falls to the third and only remaining son, the Hon. Berkeley Cecil, who, having lately inherited considerable properties from a distant relative, will, we believe, revive all the old glories of this Peerage, which have, from a variety of causes, lost somewhat of their ancient brilliancy."

Cecil sat quite still, as he had sat looking down on the record of his father's death, when Cigarette had

rallied him with her gay challenge among the Moresco ruins. His face flushed hotly under the warm golden hue of the desert bronze, then lost all its color as suddenly, till it was as pale as any of the ivory he carved. The letters of the paper reeled and wavered, and grew misty before his eyes; he lost all sense of the noisy changing polyglot crowd thronging past him; he, a common soldier in the Algerian Cavalry, knew that, by every law of birthright, he was now a Peer of England.

His first thought was for the dead man. True, there had been little amity, little intimacy, between them; a negligent friendliness whenever they had met had been all that they had ever reached. But in their childhood they had been carelessly kind to one another, and the memory of the boy who had once played beside him down the old galleries and under the old forests, of the man who had now died yonder where the southern seaboard lay across the warm blue Mediterranean, was alone on him for the moment. His thoughts had gone back, with a pang, almost ere he had read the opening lines, to autumn mornings in his youngest years when the leaves had been flushed with their earliest red, and the brown still pools had been alive with water-birds, and the dogs had dropped down charging among the flags and rushes, and his brother's boyish face had laughed on him from the wilderness of willows, and his brother's boyish hands had taught him to handle his first catridge, and to fire his first shot. The many years of indifference and estrangement were forgotten, the few years of childhood's confidence and comradeship alone remembered, as he saw the words that brought him in his exile the story of his brethren's fate and of his race's fortunes. His head sank, his face was still colorless, he sat motionless with the printed sheet in his

hand. Once his eyes flashed, his breath came fast and uneven; he rose with a sudden impulse, with a proud bold instinct of birth and freedom. Let him stand here in what grade he would, with the badge of a Corporal of the Army of Africa on his arm, this inheritance that had come to him was his; he bore the name and the title of his house as surely as any had ever borne it since the first of the Norman owners of Royallieu had followed the Bastard's banner.

The vagabond throngs, Moorish, Frank, Negro, Colan, paused as they pushed their way over the uneven road, and stared at him vacantly where he stood. There was something in his attitude, in his look, which swept over them seeing none of them, in the eager lifting of his head, in the excited fire in his eyes, that arrested all, from the dullest muleteer plodding on with his string of patient beasts, to the most volatile French girl laughing on her way with a group of *fantassins*. He did not note them, hear them, think of them; the whole of the Algerine scene had faded out as if it had no place before him; he had forgot that he was a cavalry soldier of the Empire; he saw nothing but the green wealth of the old home woods far away in England; he remembered nothing save that he, and he alone, was the rightful Lord of Royallieu.

"*Tiens, es tu fou, mon brave? Bois de m'avoine,* Bel-à-faire-peur!*"

The coarse good-humored challenge, as the hand of a broad-chested, black-visaged veteran of Chasseurs fell on his shoulder, and the wooden rim of a little wine-cup was thrust toward him with the proffered drink, startled him and recalled him to the consciousness of where he was. He stared one moment absently in the

* Brandy.

trooper's amazed face, and then shook him off with a suddenness that tossed back the cup to the ground, and holding the journal clinched close in his hand, went swiftly through the masses of the people out and away, he little noted where, till he had forced his road beyond the gates, beyond the town, beyond all reach of its dust and its babble and its discord, and was alone in the farther outskirts, where to the north the calm sunlit bay slept peacefully with a few scattered ships riding at anchor, and southward the luxuriance of the Sahel stretched to meet the wide and cheerless plateaus, dotted with the conical houses of hair, and desolate as though the locust-swarm had just alighted there to lay them waste.

Reaching the heights he stood still involuntarily, and looked down once more on the words that told him of his birthright; in the blinding intense light of the African day they seemed to stand out as though carved in stone, and as he read them once more a great darkness passed over his face;—this heritage was his, and he could never take it up; this thing had come to him, and he must never claim it. He was Viscount Royallieu as surely as any of his fathers had been so before him, and he was dead forever in the world's belief; he must live, and grow old, and perish by shot or steel, by sickness or by age, with his name and his rights buried, and his years passed as a private soldier of France.

The momentary glow which had come to him with the sudden resurrection of hope and of pride faded utterly as he slowly read and re-read the lines of the journal on the broken terraces of the hill-side, where the great fig-trees spread their fantastic shadows, and through a rocky channel a russet stream of shallow waters threaded its downward path under the reeds, and no living thing was near him save some quiet browsing

herds far off, and their Arab shepherd-lad that an artist might have sketched as Ishmael. What his future might have been rose before his thoughts; what it must be rose also, bitterly, blackly, drearily, in contrast. A noble without even a name; a chief of his race without even the power to claim kinship with that race; owner by law of three thousand broad English acres, yet an exile without freedom to set foot on his native land; by heritage one among the aristocracy of England, by circumstances, now and forever, till an Arab bullet should cut in twain his thread of life, a soldier of the African legions, bound to obey the commonest and coarsest boor that had risen to a rank above him: this was what he knew himself to be, and knew that he must continue to be without one appeal against it, without once stretching out his hand toward his right of birth and station.

There was a passionate revolt, a bitter heart-sickness on him; all the old freedom and peace and luxury and pleasure of the life he had left so long allured him with a terrible temptation; the honors of the rank that he should now have filled were not what he remembered; what he longed for with an agonized desire was to stand once more stainless among his equals, to reach once more the liberty of unchallenged unfettered life, to return once more to those who held him but as a dishonored memory, as one whom violent death had well snatched from the shame of a criminal career.

"But who would believe me now?" he thought. "Besides, this makes no difference. If three words spoken would reinstate me, I could not speak them at that cost. The beginning perhaps was folly, but for sheer justice sake there is no drawing back now. Let him enjoy it; God knows *I* do not grudge him it."

Yet though it was true to the very core that no envy and no evil lay in his heart against the younger brother

to whose lot had fallen all good gifts of men and fate, there was almost unbearable anguish on him in this hour in which he learned the inheritance that had come to him, and remembered that he could never take again even so much of it as lay in the name of his fathers. When he had given his memory up to slander and oblivion, and the shadow of a great shame, when he had let his life die out from the world that had known him, and buried it beneath the rough, weather-stained, blood-soaked cloth of a private soldier's uniform, he had not counted the cost then, nor foreseen the cost hereafter. It had fallen on him very heavily now.

Where he stood under some sheltered columns of a long-ruined mosque whose shafts were bound together by a thousand withes and wreaths of the rich fantastic Sahel foliage, an exceeding weariness of longing was upon him—longing for all that he had forfeited, for all that was his own, yet never could be claimed as his.

The day was intensely still; there was not a sound except when here and there the movement of a lizard under the dry grasses gave a low crackling rustle. He wondered almost which was the dream and which the truth; that old life that he had once led, and that looked now so far away and so unreal, or this which had been about him for so many years in the camps and the bivouacs, the barracks, and the battle-fields. He wondered almost which he himself was—an English Peer on whom the title of his line had fallen, or a Corporal of Chasseurs who must take his chief's insults as patiently as a cur takes the blows of its master; that he was *both* seemed to him as he stood there with the glisten of the sea before and the swelling slopes of the hill-side above, a vague distorted nightmare.

Hours might have passed, or only moments, he could not have told; his eyes looked blankly out at the sun-

glow, his hand instinctively clinched on the journal whose stray lines had told him in an Algerine *trattoria* that he had inherited what he never could enjoy.

"Are *they* content, I wonder?" he thought, gazing down that fiery blaze of shadowless light; "do they ever remember?"

He thought of those for whose sakes he had become what he was.

The distant mellow ringing notes of a trumpet-call floated to his ear from the town at his feet; it was sounding the "*rentrée en caserne.*" Old instinct, long habit, made him start and shake his harness together and listen. The trumpet-blast winding cheerily from afar off recalled him to the truth, summoned him sharply back from vain regrets to the facts of daily life. It woke him as it wakes a sleeping charger; it roused him as it rouses a wounded trooper.

He stood hearkening to the familiar music till it had died away, spirited, yet still lingering; full of fire, yet fading softly down the wind. He listened till the last echo ceased; then he tore the paper that he held in strips, and let it float away, drifting down the yellow current of the reedy river-channel; and he half drew from its scabbard the saber whose blade had been notched and dinted and stained in many midnight skirmishes and many headlong charges under the desert suns, and looked at it as though a friend's eye gazed at him in the gleam of the trusty steel. And his soldier-like philosophy, his campaigner's carelessness, his habitual easy negligence that had sometimes been weak as water and sometimes heroic as martyrdom, came back to him with a deeper shadow on it, that was grave with a calm, resolute, silent courage.

"So best after all, perhaps," he said half aloud in the solitude of the ruined and abandoned mosque.

"He cannot well come to shipwreck with such a fair wind and such a smooth sea. And I—I am just as well here. To ride with the Chasseurs is more exciting than to ride with the Pytchley; and the rules of the Chambrée are scarce more tedious than the rules of a Court. Nature turned me out for a soldier, though Fashion spoiled me for one. I can make a good campaigner—I should never make anything else."

And he let his sword drop back again into the scabbard, and quarreled no more with fate.

His hand touched the thirty gold pieces in his sash.

He started, as the recollection of the forgotten insult came back on him. He stood awhile in thought; then he took his resolve.

A half hour of quick movement, for he had become used to the heat as an Arab, and heeded it as little, brought him before the entrance-gates of the Villa Aïoussa. A native of Soudan, in a rich dress, who had the office of porter, asked him politely his errand. Every *indigène* learns by hard experience to be courteous to a French soldier. Cecil simply asked, in answer, if Madame la Princesse were visible. The negro returned, cautiously, that she was at home, but doubted her being accessible. "You come from M. le Marquis?" he inquired.

"No; on my own errand."

"You!" Not all the native African awe of a *Roumi* could restrain the contemptuous amaze in the word.

"I. Ask if Corporal Victor, of the Chasseurs, can be permitted a moment's interview with your mistress. I come by permission," he added, as the native hesitated between his fear of a Roumi and his sense of the appalling unfittingness of a private soldier seeking audience of a Spanish princess. The message was passed

about between several of the household; at last a servant of higher authority appeared:

"Madame permitted Corporal Victor to be taken to her presence. Would he follow?"

He uncovered his head and entered, passing through several passages and chambers, richly hung and furnished; for the villa had been the "campagne" of an illustrious French personage, who had offered it to the Princess Corona when, for some slight delicacy of health, the air of Algeria was advocated. A singular sensation came on him, half of familiarity, half of strangeness, as he advanced along them; for twelve years he had seen nothing but the bare walls of barrack-rooms, the goat-skin of douars, and the canvas of his own camp-tent. To come once more, after so long an interval, amid the old things of luxury and grace that had been so long unseen wrought curiously on him. He could not fairly disentangle past and present. For the moment, as his feet fell once more on soft carpets, and his eyes glanced over gold and silver, malachite and bronze, white silk and violet damasks, he almost thought the Algerian years were a disordered dream of the night.

His spur caught in the yielding carpet, and his saber clashed slightly against it; as the *rentrée au caserne* had done an hour before, the sound recalled the actual present to him. He was but a French soldier, who went on sufferance into the presence of a great lady. All the rest was dead and buried.

Some half dozen apartments, large and small, were crossed; then into that presence he was ushered. The room was deeply shaded, and fragrant with the odors of the innumerable flowers of the Sahel soil; there was that about it which struck on him as some air, long unheard but once intimately familiar, on the ear will re-

vive innumerable memories; like the "*vieil air languissant et funèbre*," for which Gerard de Nerval was willing to give "all Rossini and Weber." She was at some distance from him, with the trailing draperies of eastern fabrics falling about her in a rich, unbroken, shadowy cloud of melting color, through which, here and there, broke threads of gold; involuntarily he paused on the threshold looking at her. Some faint, far-off remembrance stirred in him, but deep down in the closed grave of his past; some vague intangible association of forgotten days, forgotten thoughts, drifted before him as it had drifted before him when first in the Chambrée of his barracks he had beheld the Venetia Corona.

She moved forward as her servant announced him; she saw him pause there like one spell-bound, and thought it the hesitation of one who felt sensitively his own low grade in life. She came toward him with the silent sweeping grace that gave her the carriage of an empress; her voice fell on his ear with the accent of a woman immeasurably proud, but too proud not to bend softly and graciously to those who were so far beneath her that without such aid from her they could never have addressed or have approached her.

"You have come, I trust, to withdraw your prohibition? Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to bring his Majesty's notice to one of the best soldiers his Army holds."

There was that in the words, gently as they were spoken, that recalled him suddenly to himself; they had that negligent, courteous pity she would have shown to some colon begging at her gates! He forgot—forgot utterly—that he was only an African trooper. He only remembered that he had once been a gentleman, that—if a life of honor and of self-negation can make

any so—he was one still. He advanced and bowed with the old serene elegance that his bow had once been famed for; and she, well used to be even over-critical in such trifles, thought, "That man has once lived in courts!"

"Pardon me, madame, I do not come to trespass so far upon your benignity," he answered, as he bent before her. "I come to express, rather, my regret that you should have made one single error."

"Error!"—a haughty surprise glanced from her eyes as they swept over him. Such a word had never been used to her in the whole course of her brilliant and pampered life of sovereignty and indulgence.

"One common enough, madame, in your Order. The error to suppose that under the rough cloth of a private trooper's uniform there cannot possibly be such aristocratic monopolies as nerves to wound."

"I do not comprehend you." She spoke very coldly; she repented her profoundly of her concession in admitting a Chasseur d'Afrique to her presence.

"Possibly not. Mine was the folly to dream that you would ever do so. I should not have intruded on you now, but for this reason: the humiliation you were pleased to pass on me I could neither refuse nor resent to the dealer of it. Had I done so, men who are only too loyal to me would have resented with me, and been thrashed or been shot, as payment. I was compelled to accept it, and to wait until I could return your gift to you. I have no right to complain that you pained me with it, since one who occupies my position ought, I presume, to consider remembrance, even by an outrage, an honor done to him by the Princess Corona."

As he said the last words he laid on a table that stood near him the gold of Châteauroy's insult. She had listened with a bewildered wonder, held in check by

the haughtier impulse of offense, that a man in this grade could venture thus to address, thus to arraign her. His words were totally incomprehensible to her, though, by the grave rebuke of his manner, she saw that they were fully meant, and, as he considered, fully authorized by some wrong done to him. As he laid the gold pieces down upon her table, an idea of the truth came to her.

"I know nothing of what you complain of; I sent you no money. What is it you would imply?" she asked him, looking up from where she leaned back in the low couch into whose depth she had sunk as he had spoken.

"You did not send me these? Not as payment for the chess service?"

"Assuredly not. After what you said the other day, I should have scarcely been so ill-bred and so heedless of inflicting pain. Who used my name thus?"

His face lightened with a pleasure and a relief that changed it wonderfully; that brighter look of gladness had been a stranger to it for so many years.

"You give me infinite happiness, madame. You little dream how bitter such slights are where one has lost the power to resent them! It was M. de Châteauroy, who this morning——"

"Dared to tell you I sent you those coins?"

The serenity of a courtly woman of the world was unbroken, but her blue and brilliant eyes darkened and gleamed beneath the sweep of their lashes.

"Perhaps I can scarcely say so much. He gave them, and he implied that he gave them from you. The words he spoke were these."

He told her them as they had been uttered, adding no more; she saw the construction they had been intended to bear, and that which they had borne naturally

to his ear; she listened earnestly to the end. Then she turned to him with the exquisite softness of grace which, when she was moved to it, contrasted so vividly with the haughty and almost chill languor of her habitual manner.

"Believe me, I regret deeply that you should have been wounded by this most coarse indignity; I grieve sincerely that through myself in any way it should have been brought upon you. As for the perpetrator of it, M. de Châteauroy will be received here no more; and it shall be my care that he learns not only how I resent his unpardonable use of my name, but how I esteem his cruel outrage to a defender of his own Flag. You did exceedingly well and wisely to acquaint me; in your treatment of it as an affront that I was without warrant to offer you, you showed the just indignation of a soldier, and—of what I am very sure that you are—a gentleman."

He bowed low before her.

"Madame, you have made me the debtor of my enemy's outrage. Those words from you are more than sufficient compensation for it."

"A poor one, I fear! Your Colonel is your enemy, then? And wherefore?"

He paused a moment:

"Why at first I scarcely know. We are antagonistic, I suppose."

"But is it usual for officers of his high grade to show such malice to their soldiers?"

"Most unusual. In this service especially so; although officers rising from the ranks themselves are more apt to contract prejudices and ill feeling against, as they are to feel favoritism to, their men, than where they enter the regiment in a superior grade at once. At least, that is the opinion I myself have formed, studying the working of the different systems."

"You know the English service, then?"

"I know something of it."

"And still, though thinking this, you prefer the French?"

"I distinctly prefer it, as one that knows how to make fine soldiers, and how to reward them; as one in which a brave man will be valued, and a worn-out veteran will not be left to die like a horse at a knacker's."

"A brave man valued, and yet you are a corporal?" thought Miladi, as he pursued:

"Since I am here, madame, let me thank you, in the Army's name, for your infinite goodness in acting so munificently on my slight hint. Your generosity has made many happy hearts in the hospital."

"Generosity! Oh, do not call it by any such name! What did it cost me? We are terribly selfish here. I am indebted to you that for once you made me remember those who suffered."

She spoke with a certain impulse of candor and of self-accusation that broke with great sweetness the somewhat careless coldness of her general manner; it was like a gleam of light that showed all the depth and the warmth that in truth lay beneath that imperious languor of habit. It broke further the ice of distance that severed the *grande dame* from the cavalry soldier.

Insensibly to himself, the knowledge that he had, in fact, the right to stand before her as an equal gave him the bearing of one who exercised that right, and her rapid perception had felt before now that this *Roumi* of Africa was as true a gentleman as any that had ever thronged about her in palaces. Her own life had been an uninterrupted course of luxury, prosperity, serenity, and power: the adversity which she could not but perceive had weighed on his had a strange interest to her. She had heard of many calamities, and aided many;

but they had always been far sundered from her, they had never touched her; in this man's presence they seemed to grow very close, terribly real. She led him on to speak of his comrades, of his daily life, of his harassing routine of duties in peace, and of his various experiences in war. He told her, too, of Léon Ramon's history; and as she listened, he saw a mist arise and dim the brilliancy of those eyes that men complained would never soften. The very fidelity with which he sketched to her the bitter sufferings and the rough nobility that were momentarily borne and seen in that great military family of which he had become a son by adoption, interested her by its very unlikeness to anything in her own world.

His voice had still its old sweetness, his manner still its old grace; and added to these were a grave earnestness and a natural eloquence that the darkness of his own fortunes and the sympathies with others that pain had awakened had brought to him. He wholly forgot their respective station; he only remembered that for the first time for so many years he had the charm of converse with a woman of high breeding, of inexpressible beauty, and of keen and delicate intuition. He wholly forgot how time passed, and she did not seek to remind him; indeed, she but little noted it herself.

At last the conversation turned back to his Chief.

"You seem to be aware of some motive for your commandant's dislike?" she asked him. "Tell me to what you attribute it?"

"It is a long tale, madame."

"No matter, I would hear it."

"I fear it would only weary you."

"Do not fear that. Tell it me?"

He obeyed, and told to her the story of the Emir and of the Pearl of the Desert; and Venetia Corona

listened, as she had listened to him throughout, with an interest that she rarely vouchsafed to the recitals and the witticisms of her own circle. He gave to the narrative a soldierly simplicity, and a picturesque coloring that lent a new interest to her; and she was of that nature which, however it may be led to conceal feeling from pride and from hatred, never fails to awaken to indignant sympathy at wrong.

"This barbarian is your chief?" she said, as the tale closed. "His enmity is your honor! I can well credit that he will never pardon your having stood between him and his crime."

"He has never pardoned it yet, of a surety."

"I will not tell you it was a noble action," she said, with a smile sweet as the morning, a smile that few saw light on them. "It came too naturally to a man of honor for you to care for the epithet. Yet it was a great one, a most generous one. But I have not heard one thing; what argument did you use to obtain her release?"

"No one has ever heard it," he answered her, while his voice sank low. "I will trust you with it; it will not pass elsewhere. I told him enough of—of my own past life to show him that I knew what his had been, and that I knew moreover, though they were dead to me now, men in that greater world of Europe who would believe my statement if I wrote them this outrage on the Emir, and would avenge it for the reputation of the Empire. And unless he released the Emir's wife, I swore to him that I would so write, though he had me shot on the morrow; and he knew I should keep my word."

She was silent some moments, looking on him with a musing gaze, in which some pity and more honor for him were blended.

"You told him your past. Will you confess it to me?"

"I cannot, madame."

"And why?"

"Because I am dead! Because, in your presence, it becomes more bitter to me to remember that I ever lived."

"You speak strangely. Cannot your life have a resurrection?"

"Never, madame. For a brief hour you have given it one—in dreams. It will have no other."

"But surely there may be ways,—such a story as you have told me brought to the Emperor's knowledge, you would see your enemy disgraced, yourself honored."

"Possibly, madame. But it is out of the question that it should ever be so brought. As I am now, so I desire to live and die."

"You voluntarily condemn yourself to this?"

"I have voluntarily chosen it. I am well sure that the silence I entreat will be kept by you?"

"Assuredly, unless by your wish it be broken. Yet, —I await my brother's arrival here; he is a soldier himself, I shall hope that he will persuade you to think differently of your future. At any rate, both his and my own influence will always be exerted for you, if you will avail yourself of it."

"You do me much honor, madame. All I will ever ask of you is to return those coins to my Colonel, and to forget that your gentleness has made *me* forget, for one merciful half hour, the sufferance on which alone a trooper can present himself here."

He swept the ground with his képi as though it were the plumed hat of a Marshal, and backed slowly from her presence, as he had many a time long before backed out of a throne-room.

As he went, his eyes caught the armies of the ivory chessmen; they stood under glass, and had not been broken by her lapdog.

Miladi, left alone there in her luxurious morning-room, sat awhile lost in thought. He attracted her; he interested her; he aroused her sympathy and her wonder as the men of her own world had failed to do —aroused them despite the pride which made her impatient of lending so much attention to a mere Chasseur d'Afrique. His knowledge of the fact that he was in reality the representative of his race, although the power to declare himself so had been forever abandoned and lost, had given him in her presence that day a certain melancholy, and a certain grave dignity that would have shown a far more superficial observer than she was that he had come of a great race, and had memories that were of a very different hue to the coarse and hard life which he led now. She had seen much of the world, and was naturally far more penetrative and more correct in judgment than are most women. She discovered the ring of true gold in his words, and the carriage of pure breeding in his actions. He interested her;—more than it pleased her that he should. A man so utterly beneath her!—doubtless brought into the grade to which he had fallen by every kind of error, of improvidence, of folly, of probably worse than folly!

It was too absurd that she, so difficult to interest, so inaccessible, so fastidious, so satiated with all that was brilliant and celebrated, should find herself seriously spending her thoughts, her pity, and her speculation on an adventurer of the African Army! She laughed a little at herself as she stretched out her hand for a new volume of French poems dedicated to her by their accomplished writer, who was a Parisian diplomatist.

"One would imagine I was just out of a convent,

and weaving a marvelous romance from a mystery and a *tristesse*, because the first soldier I noticed in Algeria has a gentleman's voice and is ill treated by his officers!" she thought with a smile, while she opened the poems which had that day arrived, radiant in the creamy vellum, the white velvet, and the gold of a dedication copy, with the coronet of the Corona d'Amagüe on their binding. The poems were sparkling with all the grace of airy *vers de société* and elegant silvery harmonies; but they served ill to chain her attention, for while she read her eyes wandered at intervals to the chess battalions.

"Such a man as that buried in the ranks of this brutalized army!" she mused. "What fatal chance could bring him here? Misfortune, not misconduct, surely. I wonder if Lyon could learn? He shall try."

"Your Chasseur has the air of a Prince, my love," said a voice behind her.

"Equivocal compliment! A much better air than most Princes," said Madame Corona, glancing up with a slight shrug of her shoulders, as her guest and traveling companion, the Marquise de Rénardière, entered.

"Indeed! I saw him as he passed out; and he saluted me as if he had been a Marshal. Why did he come?"

Venetia Corona pointed to the Napoléons, and told the story; rather listlessly and briefly.

"Ah! The man has been a gentleman, I dare say. So many of them come to our army. I remember General Villefleur's telling me—he commanded here awhile—that the ranks of the Zephyrs and Zouaves were full of well-born men, utterly good-for-nothing, the handsomest scoundrels possible, who had every gift and every grace, and yet come to no better end than a pistol-

shot in a ditch or a mortal thrust from Bedouin steel. I dare say your Corporal is one of them."

"It may be so."

"But you doubt it, I imagine."

"I am not sure now that I do. But this person is certainly unlike a man to whom disgrace has ever attached."

"You think your protégé, then, has become what he is through adversity, I suppose? Very interesting!"

"I really can tell you nothing of his antecedents. Through his skill at sculpture, and my notice of it, considerable indignity has been brought upon him; and a soldier can feel, it seems, though it is very absurd that he should! That is all my concern with the matter, except that I have to teach his commander not to play with my name in his barrack-yard."

She spoke with that negligence which always sounded very cold, though the words were so gently spoken. Her best and most familiar friends always knew when, with that courtly chillness, she had signed them their line of demarkation.

And the Marquise de Rénardière said no more, but talked of the Ambassador's poems.

CHAPTER XXV.

"LE BON ZIG."

MEANWHILE the subject of their first discourse returned to the Chambrée.

He had encouraged the men to pursue those various industries and ingenuities, which, though they are affectedly considered against "discipline," formed, as

he knew well, the best preservative from real insubordination, and the best instrument in humanizing and ameliorating the condition of his comrades. The habit of application alone was something gained; and if it kept them only for awhile from the haunts of those coarsest debaucheries, which are the only possible form in which the soldier can pursue the forbidden license of vice, it was better than that leisure should be spent in that joyless bestiality which made Cecil, once used to every refinement of luxury and indulgence, sicken with a pitying wonder for those who found in it the only shape they knew of "pleasure."

He had seen from the first, in many men of his *tribu*, capabilities that might be turned to endless uses; in the conscript drawn from the populace of the provinces there was almost always a knowledge of self-help, and often of some trade, coupled with habits of diligence; in the soldier made from the street-Arab of Paris there was always inconceivable intelligence, rapidity of wit, and plastic vivacity; in the adventurers come, like himself, from higher grades of society, and burying a broken career under the shelter of the tricolor, there were continually gifts and acquirements, and even genius, that had run to seed and brought forth no fruit. Of all these France always avails herself in a great degree; but, as far as Cecil's influence extended, they were developed much more than usual. As his own character gradually changed under the force of fate, the desire for some interest in life grew on him (every man, save one absolutely brainless and self-engrossed, feels this sooner or later); and that interest he found, or rather created, in his regiment. All that he could do to contribute to its efficiency in the field he did; all that he could do to further its internal excellence he did likewise.

Coarseness perceptibly abated, and violence became much rarer in that portion of his corps with which he had immediately to do; the men gradually acquired from him a better, a higher tone; they learned to do duties inglorious and distasteful as well as they did those which led them to the danger and the excitation that they loved; and, having their good faith and sympathy, heart and soul, with him, he met, in these lawless leopards of African France, with loyalty, courage, generosity, and self-abnegation far surpassing those which he had ever met with in the polished civilization of his early experience.

For their sakes, he spent many of his free hours in the Chambrée. Many a man, seeing him, there came and worked at some ingenious design, instead of going off to burn his brains out with brandy, if he had sous enough to buy any, or to do some dextrous bit of thieving on a native, if he had not. Many a time knowing him to be there sufficed to restrain the talk around from lewdness and from ribaldry, and turn it into channels at once less loathsome and more mirthful, because they felt that obscenity and vulgarity were alike jarring on his ear, although he had never more than tacitly shown that they were so. A precisian would have been covered with their contumely and ridicule; a saint would have been driven out from their midst with every missile merciless tongues and merciless hands could pelt with; a martinet would have been cursed aloud, and cheated, flouted, rebelled against, on every possible occasion. But the man who was "one of them" entirely, while yet simply and thoroughly a gentleman, had great influence—an influence exclusively for good.

The Chambrée was empty when he returned; the men were scattered over the town in one of their scant pauses of liberty; there was only the dog of the regi-

ment, Flick-Flack, a snow-white poodle, asleep in the heat, on a sack, who, without waking, moved his tail in a sign of gratification as Cecil stroked him, and sat down near, betaking himself to the work he had in hand.

It was a stone for the grave of Léon Ramon. There was no other to remember the dead Chasseur; no other beside himself, save an old woman sitting spinning at her wheel under the low-sloping shingle roof of a cottage by the western Biscayan sea, who, as she spun, and as the thread flew, looked with anxious aged eyes over the purple waves where she had seen his father—the son of her youth—go down beneath the waters, and murmured ever and again, "*Il r'viendra! il r'viendra!*"

But the thread of her flax would be spun out, and the thread of her waning life be broken, ere ever the soldier for whom she watched would go back to her and to Languedoc.

For life is brutal; and to none so brutal as to the aged, who remember so well, and yet are forgotten as though already they were amid the dead.

Cecil's hand pressed the graver along the letters, but his thoughts wandered far from the place where he was. Alone there, in the great sun-scorched barrack-room, the news that he had read, the presence he had quitted, seemed alike a dream.

He had never known fully all that he had lost until he had stood before the beauty of this woman, in whose deep imperial eyes the light of other years seemed to lie, the memories of other worlds seemed to slumber.

These blue, proud, fathomless eyes! Why had they looked on him? He had grown content with his fate; he had been satisfied to live and to fall a soldier of

France; he had set a seal on that far-off life of his earlier time, and had grown to forget that it had ever been. Why had chance flung him in her way, that with one careless haughty glance, one smile of courteous pity, she should have undone in a moment all the work of a half-score years, and shattered in a day the serenity which it had cost him such weary self-contest, such hard-fought victory, to attain?

She had come to pain, to weaken, to disturb, to influence him, to shadow his peace, to wring his pride, to unman his resolve, as women do mostly with men. Was life not hard enough here already, that she must make it more bitter yet to bear?

He had been content, with a soldier's contentment, in danger and in duty; and she must waken the old coiled serpent of restless stinging regret which he had thought lulled to rest forever!

"If I had my heritage?" he thought; and the chisel fell from his hands as he looked down the length of the barrack-room with the blue glare of the African sky through the casement.

Then he smiled at his own folly, in dreaming idly thus of things that might have been.

"I will see her no more," he said to himself. "If I do not take care, I shall end by thinking myself a martyr—the last refuge and consolation of emasculate vanity, of impotent egotism!"

For though his whole existence was a sacrifice, it never occurred to him that there was anything whatever great in its acceptation, or unjust in its endurance. He thought too little of his life's value, or of its deserts, even to consider by any chance that it had been harshly dealt with, or unmeritedly visited.

At that instant Petit Picpon's keen, pale, Parisian face peered through the door, his great black eyes, that at

times had so pathetic a melancholy, and at others such a monkeyish mirth and malice, were sparkling excitedly and gleefully.

"Mon Caporal!"

"You, Picpon? What is it?"

"*Mon Caporal*, there is great news. *La danse commence là-bas.*" *

"Ah! Are you sure?"

"Sure, *mon Caporal*. The *Arbicos* want a *fantasia à la clarinette.*† We are not to know just yet: we are to have the *ordre de route* to-morrow. I overheard our officers say so. They think we shall have brisk work. And for that they will not punish the *vieille lame.*"

"Punish! Is there fresh disobedience? In my squadron; in my absence?"

He rose instinctively, buckling on the sword which he had put aside.

"Not in your *tribu*, mon Caporal," said Picpon, quickly. "It is not much, either. Only the *bon-zig* Rac."

"Rake? What has he been doing?"

There was infinite anxiety and vexation in his voice. Rake had recently been changed into another squadron of the regiment, to his great loss and regret; for not only did he miss the man's bright face and familiar voice from the Chambrée, but he had much disquietude on the score of his safety, for Rake was an incorrigible *pratique*, had only been kept from scrapes and mischief by Cecil's influence, and even despite that had been often in hot water, and once even had been drafted for a year or so of chastisement among the "Zephyrs," a mode of punishment which, but for its separation of

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* There is fighting broken out yonder.

† A skirmish to the music of musketry.

him from his idol, would have given unmitigated delight to the audacious offender.

"Very little, *mon Caporal!*" said Picpon, eagerly. "A mere nothing—a bagatelle! Run a Spahi through the stomach, that is all. I don't think the man is so much as dead, even!"

"I hope not, indeed. When will you cease this brawling among yourselves? A soldier's blade should never be turned upon men of his own army. How did it happen?"

"*Pour si peu de chose, mon Caporal.* A woman! They quarreled about a little fruit-seller. The *homard** was in fault. *Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort* was there before him, and was preferred by the girl; and women should be allowed something to do with choosing their lovers, that I think, though it is true they often take the worst man. They quarreled; the *homard* drew first; and then, *pouf et passe!* quick as thought, Rac lunged through him. He has always a most beautiful stroke. Le Capitaine Argentier was passing, and made a fuss; else nothing would have been done. They have put him under arrest, but I heard them say they would let him free to-night because we should march at dawn."

"I will go and see him at once."

"Wait, *mon Caporal;* I have something to tell you," said Picpon, quickly. "The *zig* has a motive in what he does. Rac wanted to get the *trou.*† He has done more than one bit of mischief only for that."

"Only for what? He cannot be in love with the *trou?*"

"It serves his turn," said Picpon, mysteriously. "Did you never guess why, *mon Caporal?* Well, I have. *Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort* is a *risquetout.*‡ The

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* Spahi. † Prison. ‡ A fine fearless soldier.

officers know it; the bureaus know it. He would have mounted, mounted, mounted, and been a Captain long before now if he had not been a *pratique*."

"I know that; so would many of you."

"Ah, *mon Caporal;* but that is just what Rac does not choose. In the books his page beats every man's, except yours. They have talked of him many times for the cross and for promotion; but whenever they do—*cri-crac!* he goes off to a bit of mischief, and gets himself punished. Any *rabiat*,* long or short, serves his purpose. They think him too wild to take out of the ranks. You remember, *mon Caporal*, that splendid thing that he did five years ago at Sabasasta? Well, you know they spoke of promoting him for it, and he would have run up all the grades like a squirrel, and died a *Kébir*,† I dare say. What did he do to prevent it? Why, went that escapade into Oran disguised as a Dervish, and got the *trou* instead."

"To prevent it? Not purposely?"

"Purposely, *mon Caporal*," said Petit Picpon, with a sapient nod that spoke volumes. "He always does something when he thinks promotion is coming—something to get himself out of its way, do you see? And the reason is this: 'tis a good *zig*, and loves you, and will not be put over your head. 'Me rise afore him?' said the *zig* to me once. 'I'll have the *As de pique* ‡ on my collar fifty times over first! He's a Prince, and I'm a mongrel got in a gutter! I owe him more'n I'll ever pay, and I'll kill the Kébir himself afore I'll insult him that way.' So say little to him about the Spahi, *mon Caporal*. He loves you well, does your Rac."

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* Term of punishment. † General.

‡ A little mark in black cloth that distinguishes the battalion of the "Incorrigibles."

"Well indeed! Good God! what nobility!"

Picpon glanced at him; then with the tact of his nation, glided away and busied himself teaching Flick-Flack to shoulder and present arms, the weapon being a long chibouque-stick.

"After all, Diderot was in the right when he told Rousseau which side of the question to take," mused Cecil as he crossed the barrack-yard a few minutes later to visit the incarcerated *pratique*. "On my life, civilization develops comfort, but I do believe it kills nobility. Individuality dies in it, and egotism grows strong and specious. Why is it that in a polished life a man, while becoming incapable of sinking to crime, almost always becomes also incapable of rising to greatness? Why is it that misery, tumult, privation, bloodshed, famine, beget, in such a life as this, such countless things of heroism, of endurance, of self-sacrifice—things worthy of demigods—in men who quarrel with the wolves for a wild-boar's carcass, for a sheep's offal?"

A question which perplexes, very wearily, thinkers who have more time, more subtlety, and more logic to bring to its unravelment than Bertie had either leisure or inclination to do.

"Is this true, Rake,—that you intentionally commit these freaks of misconduct to escape promotion?" he asked of the man when he stood alone with him in his place of confinement.

Rake flushed a little.

"Mischief's bred in me, sir: it must come out. It's just bottled up in me like ale; if I didn't take the cork out now and then, I should fly apieces!"

"But many a time when you have been close on the reward of your splendid gallantry in the field, you have frustrated your own fortunes and the wishes of your superiors by wantonly proving yourself unfit for the

higher grade they were going to raise you to; why do you do that?"

Rake fidgeted restlessly, and, to avoid the awkwardness of the question, replied, like a Parliamentary orator, by a flow of rhetoric.

"Sir, there's a many chaps like me. They can't help *nohow* bustin' out when the fit takes 'em. 'Taint reasonable to blame 'em for it; they're just made so, like a chestnut's made to bust its pod, and a chicken to bust its shell. Well, you see, sir, France she know that, and she say to herself, 'Here are these madcaps, if I keep 'em tight in hand I shan't do nothin' with 'em—they'll turn obstreperous and cram my convict-cells. Now I want soldiers, I don't want convicts. I can't let 'em stay in the Regulars, 'cause they'll be for making all the army wildfire like 'em; I'll just draft 'em by theirselves, treat 'em different, and let 'em fire away. They've got good stuff in 'em, though too much of the curb riles 'em.' Well, sir, she do that; and aren't the Zephyrs as fine a lot of fellows as any in the service? Of course they are; but if they'd been in England—God bless her, the dear old d—d obstinate soul!—they'd have been druv' crazy along o' pipeclay and razors; *she'd* never have seed what was in 'em, her eyes are so bunged up with routine. If a pup riot in the pack, she's no notion but to double-thong him, and a'course, in double-quick time, she finds herself obliged to go further and hang him. She don't ever remember that it may be only just along of his breedin', and that he may make a very good hound elseways let out a bit, though he'll spile the whole pack if she *will* be a fool and try to make a steady line-hunter of him straight agin his nature."

Rake stopped breathless in his rhetoric, which con-

tained more truth in it, as also more roughness, than most rhetoric does.

"You are right. But you wander from my question," said Cecil, gently. "Do you avoid promotion?"

"Yes, sir, I do," said Rake, something sulkily; for he felt he was being driven "up a corner." "I *do*. I ain't not one bit fitter for an officer than that rioting pup I talk on is fit to lead them crack packs at home. I should be in a strait-waistcoat if I was promoted; and as for the cross—Lord, sir, that would get me into a world o' trouble! I should pawn it for a toss of wine the first day out, or give it to the first *moukiera* that winked her black eye for it! The star put on my buttons suits me a deal better; if you'll believe me, sir, it do."*

Cecil's eyes rested on him with a look that said far more than his answer.

"Rake, I know you better than you would let me do, if you had your way. My noble fellow! you reject advancement, and earn yourself an unjust reputation for mutinous conduct, because you are too generous to be given a step above mine in the regiment."

"Who's a been a tellin' you that trash, sir?" retorted Rake, with ferocity.

"No matter who. It is no trash. It is a splendid loyalty of which I am utterly unworthy, and it shall be my care that it is known at the Bureaus, so that henceforth your great merits may be——"

"Stow that, sir!" cried Rake, vehemently. "Stow that *if* you please! Promoted I *won't* be—no, not if the Emperor hisself was to order it, and come across here to see it done! A pretty thing, surely! Me a

* The star on the metal buttons of the insubordinates, or Zephyrs.

officer, and you never a one—me a commandin' of you, and you a salutin' of me! By the Lord, sir! we might as well see the camp-scullions a ridin' in state, and the Marshal a scouring out the soup-pots!"

"Not at all. This Army has not a finer soldier than yourself; you have a right to the reward of your services in it. And I assure you you do me a great injustice if you think I would not as willingly go out under your orders as under those of all the Marshals of the Empire."

The tears rushed into the hardy eyes of the redoubtable "Crache au-nez-d'la-Mort," though he dashed them away in a fury of eloquence.

"Sir, if you don't understand as how you've given me a power more than all the crosses in the world in saying of them there words, why *you* don't know *me* much either, that's all. You're a gentleman—a right on rare thing that is—and, bein' a gentleman, a course you'd be too generous and too proud like not to behave well to me, whether I was a servin' you as I've always served you, or a insultin' of you by ridin' over your head in that way as we're speakin' on. But I know my place, sir, and I know yours. If it wasn't for that ere Black Hawk—damn him!—I can't help it, sir, I *will* damn him, if he shoot me for it—you'd been a Chef d'Escadron by now. There ain't the leastest doubt of it. Ask all the *zigs* what they think. Well, sir, now you know I'm a man what do as I say; if you don't let me have my own way, and if you do the littlest thing to get me a step, why, sir, I swear as I'm a livin' bein', that I'll draw on Châteauroy the first time I see him afterwards, and slit his throat as I'd slit a jackal's! There—my oath's took!"

And Cecil saw that it would also be kept. The natural lawlessness and fiery passion inborn in Rake

had of course not been cooled by the teachings of African warfare; and his hate was intense against the all-potent Chief of his regiment, as intense as the love he bore to the man whom he had followed out into exile.

Cecil tried vainly to argue with him; all his reasonings fell like hailstones on a cuirass, and made no more impression; he was resolute.

"But listen to one thing," he urged at last. "Can you not see how you pain me by this self-sacrifice? If I knew that you had attained a higher grade, and wore your epaulettes in this service, can you not fancy I should feel pleasure then (as I feel regret, even remorse, now) that I brought you to Africa through my own follies and misfortunes?"

"Do you, sir? There ain't the least cause for it, then," returned Rake, sturdily. "Lor' bless you, sir, why this life's made a purpose for me! If ever a round peg went trim and neat into a round hole, it was when I came into this here Army. I never was so happy in all my days before. They're right on good fellows, and 'll back you to the death if so be as you've allays been share-and-share-alike with 'em, as a *zig* should. As a private, sir, I'm happy and I'm *safe;* as a officer, I should be kicking over the traces, and blunderin' everlastingly. However, there ain't no need to say a word more about it; I've sworn, and you've heerd me swear, sir, and you know as how I shall keep my oath if ever I'm provoked to it by bein' took notice of. I stuck that *homard* just now just by way of a lark, and only 'cause he come where he'd no business to poke his turbaned old pate; 'tain't likely as I shall stop at givin' the Hawk two inches of steel if he comes such a insult over us both as to offer a blackguard like me the epaulettes as you ought to be a wearin'!"

And Cecil knew that it was hopeless either to persuade him to his own advantage or to convince him of his disobedience in speaking thus of his supreme, before his non-commissioned, officer. He was himself, moreover, deeply moved by the man's fidelity.

He stretched his hand out:

"I wish there were more blackguards with hearts like yours. I cannot repay your love, Rake, but I can value it."

Rake put his own hands behind his back.

"God bless you, sir, you've repaid it ten dozen times over. But you shan't do *that*, sir. I told you long ago, I'm too much of a scamp! Some day, p'rhaps, as I said, when I've settled scores with myself, and wiped off all the bad 'uns with a clear sweep, tolerably clean. Not afore, sir!"

And Rake was too sturdily obstinate not to always carry his point.

The love that he bore to Cecil was very much such a wild, chivalric, romantic fidelity as the Cavaliers or the Gentlemen of the North bore to their Stuart idols. That his benefactor had become a soldier of Africa in no way lessened the reverent love of his loyalty, any more than theirs was lessened by the adversities of their royal masters. Like theirs, also, it had beauty in its blindness—the beauty that lies in every pure unselfishness.

Meanwhile, Picpon's news was correct.

The regiment was ordered out *à la danse*.* There was fresh war in the interior; and wherever there was the hottest slaughter, there the Black Hawk always flew down with his falcon-flock. When Cecil left his incorrigible *zig*, the trumpets were sounding an assembly;

* On the march.

there were noise, tumult, eagerness, excitement, delighted zest on every side; a general order was read to the enraptured squadrons: they were to leave the town at the first streak of dawn.

There were before them death, deprivation, long days of famine, long days of drought and thirst; parching sun-baked roads; bitter chilly nights; fiery furnace-blasts of sirocco; killing, pitiless, northern winds; hunger, only sharpened by a snatch of raw meat or a handful of maize; and the probabilities, ten to one, of being thrust under the sand to rot, or left to have their skeletons picked clean by the vultures. But what of that? There were also the wild delight of combat, the freedom of lawless warfare, the joy of deep strokes thrust home, the chance of plunder, of wine-skins, of cattle, of women; above all, that lust for slaughter which burns so deep down in the hidden souls of men, and gives them such brotherhood with wolf, and vulture, and tiger, when once its flame bursts forth.

That evening, at the Villa Aïoussa there gathered a courtly assembly, of much higher rank than Algiers can commonly afford, because many of station as lofty as her own had been drawn thither to follow her to what the Princess Corona called her banishment—an endurable banishment enough under those azure skies, in that clear elastic air, and with that charming "bonbonnière" in which to dwell, yet still a banishment to the reigning beauty of Paris, to one who had the habits and the commands of a wholly undisputed sovereignty in the royal splendor of her womanhood.

There was a variety of distractions to prevent ennui; there were half a dozen clever Paris actors playing the airiest of vaudevilles in the Bijou theater, beyond the drawing-rooms; there were some celebrated Italian singers whom an Imperial Prince had brought over in

his yacht; there was the best music; there was wit as well as homage whispered in her ear. Yet she was not altogether amused; she was a little touched with ennui.

"Those men are very stupid. They have not half the talent of that soldier!" she thought once, turning from a Peer of France, an Austrian Arch-Duke, and a Russian diplomatist. And she smiled a little, furling her fan and musing on the horror that the triad of fashionable conquerors near her would feel if they knew that she thought them duller than an African *lascar!*

But they only told her things of which she had been long weary, specially of her own beauty; he had told her of things totally unknown to her, things real, terrible, vivid, strong, sorrowful—strong as life, sorrowful as death.

"Châteauroy and his Chasseurs have an *ordre de route*," a voice was saying, that moment, behind her chair.

"Indeed?" said another. "The Black Hawk is never so happy as when unhooded. When do they go?"

"To-morrow. At dawn."

"There is always fighting here, I suppose?"

"Oh yes. The losses in men are immense; only the journals would get a *communiqué*, or worse, if they ventured to say so in France. How delicious La Doche is! She comes in again with the next scene."

The Princess Corona listened; and her attention wandered farther from the Arch-Duke, the Peer, and the diplomatist, as from the Vaudeville. She did not find Mme. Doche very charming; and she was absorbed for a time looking at the miniatures on her fan.

At the same moment, through the lighted streets of Algiers, Cigarette, like a union of fairy and of fury, was

flying with the news. Cigarette had seen the flame of war at its height, and had danced in the midst of its whitest heat, as young children dance to see the fires leap red in the black winter's night. Cigarette loved the battle, the charge, the wild music of bugles, the thunder-tramp of battalions, the sirocco-sweep of light squadrons, the mad *tarantala* of triumph when the slaughter was done, the grand swoop of the Eagles down unto the carnage, the wild hurrah of France.

She loved them with all her heart and soul; and she flew now through the starlit sultry night crying, "La guerre! La guerre! La guerre!" and chanting to the enraptured soldiery a *Marseillaise* of her own improvisation, all slang, and doggerel, and barrack-grammar; but fire-giving as a torch, and rousing as a bugle, in the way she sang it, waving the tricolor high above her head:

Fantasia,
Deo Gratia!
En avant!
On t'attend!
Au cor et à cri
Suivez, mes Spahis,
On s'élance à la danse,
Pour la gloire de la France.
Fusillons,
Bataillons!
Et marchons
Au guidons!
Va, loustic,
Et du cric
Vides ton verre.
À la guerre!
C'est l'Amie du Drapeau
Qui s'appelle son troupeau!
Faisons pouff à l'Emir,
Faisons style à venir,
De l'avoine la moisson,
Portera belle boisson,

Le Zéphyr au douar
F'ra retentir son cor,
Chasse-marais cont' fleurettes
S'emparant des fillettes,
Et sous l'Aigle mes Roumis,
Vont gorger les Arbis,
À la musique si nette
De la haute clarinette!
Razzia,
Grazia,
Est ici,
Mes Spahis,
A l'amour! Aux beaux jours!
Rataplan des tambours,
Nous appelle, "R'lin tintin,
Vîte au rire, au butin!"
Vive la gloire!
Vive le boire!
Vive le vin rosé du sang!
Vive le feu volage des rangs!
Vive tout ça qui va nous faire
Paradis au fond d'enfer,
Par la Guerre, par la Guerre!
En avant! Allons! Buvons!
En avant! Allons! Mourrons!

CHAPTER XXVI.

ZARAILA.

THE African day was at its noon.

From the first break of dawn the battle had raged; now, at mid-day, it was at its height. Far in the interior, almost on the edge of the great desert, in that terrible season when air that is flame by day is ice by night, and when the scorch of a blazing sun may be followed in an hour by the blinding fury of a snow-storm, the slaughter had gone on hour through hour

under a shadowless sky, blue as steel, hard as a sheet of brass. The Arabs had surprised the French encampment where it lay in the center of an arid plain that was called Zaraila. Hovering like a cloud of hawks on the entrance of the Sahara, massed together for one mighty if futile effort, with all their ancient war-lust, and with a new despair, the tribes who refused the yoke of the alien empire were once again in arms, were once again combined in defence of those limitless kingdoms of drifting sand, of that beloved belt of bare and desolate land so useless to the conqueror, so dear to the nomad. When they had been, as it had been thought, beaten back into the desert wilderness, when, without water, and without cattle, it had been calculated that they would, of sheer necessity, bow themselves in submission, or perish of famine and of thirst, they had recovered their ardor, their strength, their resistance, their power to harass without ceasing, if they could never arrest the enemy. They had cast the torch of war afresh into the land, and here, southward, the flame burned bitterly, and with a merciless tongue devoured the lives of men, licking them up as a forest fire the dry leaves and the touchwood.

Circling, sweeping, silently, swiftly, with that rapid spring, that marvelous whirlwind of force, that is of Africa, and of Africa alone, the tribes had rushed down in the darkness of night, lightly as a kite rushes through the gloom of the dawn. For once the vigilance of the invader served him naught; for once the Frankish camp was surprised off its guard. While the air was still chilly with the breath of the night, while the first gleam of morning had barely broken through the mists of the east, while the picket-fires burned through the dusky gloom, and the sentinels and videttes paced slowly to and fro, and circled round, hearing nothing

worse than the stealthy tread of the jackal, or the muffled flight of a night-bird, afar in the south a great dark cloud had risen, darker than the brooding shadows of the earth and sky.

The cloud swept onward, like a mass of cirri, in those shadows shrouded. Fleet as though wind-driven, dense as though thunder-charged, it moved over the plains. As it grew nearer and nearer, it grew grayer, a changing mass of white and black that fused, in the obscurity, into a shadow color; a dense array of men and horses flitting noiselessly like spirits, and as though guided alone by one rein and moved alone by one breath and one will; not a bit champed, not a linen-fold loosened, not a shiver of steel was heard; as silently as the winds of the desert sweep up northward over the plains, so they rode now, host upon host of the warriors of the soil.

The outlying videttes, the advanced sentinels, had scrutinized so long through the night every wavering shade of cloud and moving form of buffalo in the dim distance, that their sleepless eyes, strained and aching, failed to distinguish this moving mass that was so like the brown plains and starless sky that it could scarce be told from them. The night, too, was bitter; northern cold cut hardly chillier than this that parted the blaze of one hot day from the blaze of another. The sea-winds were blowing cruelly keen, and men who at noon gladly stripped to their shirts, shivered now where they lay under canvas.

Awake while his comrades slept around him, Cecil was stretched half unharnessed. The foraging duty of the past twenty-four hours had been work harassing and heavy, inglorious and full of fatigue. The country round was bare as a table-rock; the water-courses poor, choked with dust and stones, unfed as yet by the rains

or snows of the approaching winter. The horses suffered sorely, the men scarce less. The hay for the former was scant and bad; the rations for the latter often cut off by flying skirmishers of the foe. The campaign, so far as it had gone, had been fruitless, yet had cost largely in human life. The men died rapidly of dysentery, disease, and the chills of the nights, and had severe losses in countless obscure skirmishes, that served no end except to water the African soil with blood.

True, France would fill the gaps up as fast as they occurred, and the *Moniteur* would only allude to the present operations when it could give a flourishing line descriptive of the Arabs being driven back, decimated, to the borders of the Sahara. But as the flourish of the *Moniteur* would never reach a thousand little way-side huts, and sea-side cabins, and vine-dressers' sunny nests, where the memory of some lad who had gone forth never to return would leave a deadly shadow athwart the humble threshold, so the knowledge that they were only so many automata in the hands of government, whose loss would merely be noted that it might be efficiently supplied, was not that wine-draught of La Gloire, which poured the strength and the daring of gods into the limbs of the men of Jena and of Austerlitz. Still, there was the war-lust in them, and there was the fire of France; they fought not less superbly here, where to be food for jackal and kite was their likeliest doom, than their sires had done under the eagles of the First Empire, when the Conscript hero of to-day was the glittering Marshal of to-morrow.

Cecil had awakened while the camp still slept. Do what he would, force himself into the fullness of this fierce and hard existence as he might, he could not burn out or banish a thing that had many a time

haunted him, but never as it did now—the remembrance of a woman. He almost laughed as he lay there on a pile of rotting straw, and wrung the truth out of his own heart, that he—a soldier of these exiled squadrons—was mad enough to love that woman, whose deep proud eyes had dwelt with such serene pity upon him.

Yet his hand clinched on the straw as it had clinched once when the operator's knife had cut down through the bones of his breast to reach a bullet that, left in his chest, would have been death. If in the sight of men he had only stood in the rank that was his by birthright, he could have strived for—it might be that he could have roused—some answering passion in her. But that chance was lost to him forever. Well, it was but one thing more that was added to all that he had of his own will given up. He was dead; he must be content, as the dead must be, to leave the warmth of kisses, the glow of delight, the possession of a woman's loveliness, the homage of men's honor, the gladness of successful desires, to those who still lived in the light he had quitted. He had never allowed himself the emasculating indulgence of regret; he flung it off him now.

Flick-Flack, coiled asleep in his bosom, thrilled, stirred, and growled. He rose, and, with the little dog under his arm, looked out from the canvas. He knew that the most vigilant sentry in the service had not the instinct for a foe afar off that Flick-Flack possessed. He gazed keenly southward, the poodle growling on; that cloud so dim, so distant, caught his sight. Was it a moving herd, a shifting mist, a shadow-play between the night and dawn?

For a moment longer he watched it; then what it was he knew, or felt by such strong instinct as makes

knowledge; and like the blast of a clarion his alarm rang over the unarmed and slumbering camp.

An instant, and the hive of men, so still, so motionless, broke into violent movement; and from the tents the half-clothed sleepers poured, wakened, and fresh in wakening as hounds. Perfect discipline did the rest. With marvelous, with matchless swiftness and precision they harnessed and got under arms. They were but fifteen hundred or so in all—a single squadron of Chasseurs, two battalions of Zouaves, half a corps of Tirailleurs, and some Turcos; only a branch of the main body, and without artillery. But they were some of the flower of the army of Algiers, and they roused in a second, with the vivacious ferocity of the bounding tiger, with the glad eager impatience for the slaughter of the unloosed hawk. Yet, rapid in its wondrous celerity as their united action was, it was not so rapid as the downward sweep of that war-cloud that came so near, with the tossing of white draperies and the shine of countless sabers, now growing clearer and clearer out of the darkness, till, with the whir like the noise of an eagle's wings, and a swoop like an eagle's seizure, the Arabs whirled down upon them, met a few yards in advance by the answering charge of the Light Cavalry.

There was a crash as if rock were hurled upon rock, as the Chasseurs, scarce seated in saddle, rushed forward to save the pickets, to encounter the first blind force of the attack, and to give the infantry, further in, more time for harness and defense. Out of the caverns of the night an armed multitude seemed to have suddenly poured. A moment ago they had slept in security; now thousands on thousands whom they could not number, whom they could but dimly even perceive, were thrown on them in immeasurable hosts, which the encircling cloud of dust served but to render vaster,

ghastlier, and more majestic. The Arab line stretched out with wings that seemed to extend on and on without end; the line of the Chasseurs was not one-half its length; they were but a single squadron flung in their stirrups, scarcely clothed, knowing only that the foe was upon them, caring only that their sword-hands were hard on their weapons. With all the *élan* of France they launched themselves forward to break the rush of the desert horses; they met with a terrible sound, like falling trees, like clashing metal.

The hoofs of the rearing chargers struck each other's breasts, and these bit and tore at each other's manes, while their riders reeled down dead. Frank and Arab were blent in one inextricable mass as the charging squadrons encountered. The outer wings of the tribes were spared the shock, and swept on to meet the bayonets of Zouaves and Turcos as at their swift foot-gallop the Enfans Perdus of France threw themselves forward from the darkness. The cavalry was enveloped in the overwhelming numbers of the center; and the flanks seemed to cover the Zouaves and Tirailleurs as some great settling mist may cover the cattle who move beneath it.

It was not a battle; it was a frightful tangling of men and brutes. No contest of modern warfare, such as commences and conquers by a duel of artillery, and, sometimes, gives the victory to whomsoever has the superiority of ordnance, but a conflict, hand to hand, breast to breast, life for life, a Homeric combat of spear and of sword even while the first volleys of the answering musketry pealed over the plain.

For once the Desert avenged in like that terrible inexhaustibility of supply wherewith the Empire so long had crushed them beneath the overwhelming difference of numbers. It was the Day of Mazagran once more,

as the light of the morning broke, gray, silvered, beautiful, in the far, dim distance, beyond the tawny seas of reeds. Smoke and sand soon densely rose above the struggle, white, hot, blinding; but out from it the lean dark Bedouin faces, the snowy haïcks, the red burnous, the gleam of the Tunisian muskets, the flash of the silver-hilted yataghans, were seen fused in a mass with the brawny naked necks of the Zouaves, with the shine of the French bayonets, with the tossing manes and glowing nostrils of the Chasseurs' horses, with the torn, stained silk of the raised Tricolor, through which the storm of balls flew thick and fast as hail, yet whose folds were never suffered to fall, though again and again the hand that held its staff was cut away or was unloosed in death, yet ever found another to take its charge before the Flag could once have trembled in the enemy's sight.

The Chasseurs could not charge; they were hemmed in, packed between bodies of horsemen that pressed them together as between iron plates; now and then they could cut their way through, clear enough to reach their comrades of the *demie cavalerie*, but as often as they did so, so often the overwhelming numbers of the Arabs surged in on them afresh like a flood, and closed upon them, and drove them back.

Every soldier in the squadron that lived kept his life by sheer, breathless, ceaseless, hand-to-hand sword-play, hewing right and left, front and rear, without pause, as in the great tangled forests of the west men hew aside branch and brushwood ere they can force one step forward.

The gleam of the dawn spread in one golden glow of morning, and the day rose radiant over the world; they stayed not for its beauty or its peace; the carnage went on hour upon hour; men began to grow drunk

with slaughter as with raki. It was sublimely grand; it was hideously hateful—this wild beast struggle, this heaving tumult of striving lives that ever and anon stirred the vast war-cloud of smoke and broke from it as the lightning from the night. The sun laughed in its warmth over a thousand hills and streams, over the blue seas lying northward, and over the yellow sands of the south; but the touch of its heat only made the flame in their blood burn fiercer; the fullness of its light only served to show them clearer where to strike and how to slay.

It was bitter, stifling, cruel work; with their mouths choked with sand, with their throats caked with thirst, with their eyes blind with smoke; cramped as in a vice, scorched with the blaze of powder, covered with blood and with dust; while the steel was thrust through nerve and sinew, or the shot plowed through bone and flesh. The answering fire of the Zouaves and Tirailleurs kept the Arabs further at bay, and mowed them faster down; but in the Chasseurs' quarter of the field—parted from the rest of their comrades as they had been by the rush of that broken charge with which they had sought to save the camp and arrest the foe—the worst pressure of the attack was felt, and the fiercest of the slaughter fell.

The Chef d'Escadron had been shot dead as they had first swept out to encounter the advance of the desert horsemen; one by one the officers had been cut down, singled out by the keen eyes of their enemies, and throwing themselves into the deadliest of the carnage with the impetuous self-devotion characteristic of their service. At the last there remained but a mere handful out of all the brilliant squadron that had galloped down in the gray of the dawn to meet the whirlwind of Arab fury. At their head was Cecil.

Two horses had been killed under him, and he had

thrown himself afresh across unwounded chargers, whose riders had fallen in the mêlée, and at whose bridles he had caught as he shook himself free of the dead animals' stirrups. His head was uncovered; his uniform, hurriedly thrown on, had been torn aside, and his chest was bare to the red folds of his sash; he was drenched with blood, not his own, that had rained on him as he fought; and his face and his hands were black with smoke and with powder. He could not see a yard in front of him; he could not tell how the day went anywhere, save in that corner where his own troop was hemmed in. As fast as they beat the Arabs back, and forced themselves some clearer space, so fast the tribes closed in afresh. No orders reached him from the General of Brigade in command; except for the well-known war-shouts of the Zouaves that ever and again rang above the din, he could not tell whether the French battalions were not cut utterly to pieces under the immense numerical superiority of their foes. All he could see was that every officer of Chasseurs was down, and that unless he took the vacant place, and rallied them together, the few score troopers that were still left would scatter confused and demoralized, as the best soldiers will at times when they can see no chief to follow.

He spurred the horse he had just mounted against the dense crowd opposing him, against the hard black wall of dust, and smoke, and steel, and savage faces, and lean swarthy arms, which were all that his eyes could see, and that seemed impenetrable as granite, moving and changing though it was. He thrust the gray against it, while he waved his sword above his head:

"*En avant, mes frères! France! France! France!*"

His voice, well known, well loved, thrilled the hearts

of his comrades, and brought them together like a trumpet-call. They had gone with him many a time into the hell of battle, into the jaws of death. They surged about him now, striking, thrusting, forcing, with blows of their sabers or their lances and blows of their beasts' fore-feet, a passage one to another, until they were reunited once more as one troop, while their shrill shouts, like an oath of vengeance, echoed after him in the butchery, that has pealed victorious over so many fields from the soldiery of France. They loved him; he had called them his brethren. They were like lambs for him to lead, like tigers for him to incite.

They could scarcely see his face in that great red mist of combat, in that horrible stifling pressure on every side that jammed them as if they were in a press of iron, and gave them no power to pause, though their animals' hoofs struck the lingering life out of some half-dead comrade, or trampled over the writhing limbs of the brother-in-arms they loved dearest and best. But his voice reached them, clear and ringing in its appeal for sake of the country they never once forgot or once reviled, though in her name they were starved and beaten like rebellious hounds, though in her cause they were exiled all their manhood through under the sun of this cruel, ravenous, burning Africa. They could see him lift aloft the Eagle he had caught from the last hand that had borne it, the golden gleam of the young morning flashing like flame upon the brazen wings; and they shouted, as with one throat, "*Mazagran! Mazagran!*" As the battalion of Mazagran had died keeping the ground through the whole of the scorching day, while the fresh hordes poured down on them like ceaseless torrents snow-fed and exhaustless, so they were ready to hold the ground here, until of all their numbers there should be left not one living man.

He glanced back on them, guarding his head the while from the lances that were rained on him; and he lifted the Guidon higher and higher, till, out of the ruck and the throng, the brazen bird caught afresh the rays of the rising sun.

"*Suivez-moi!*" he shouted.

Then, like arrows launched at once from a hundred bows, they charged, he still slightly in advance of them, the bridle flung upon his horse's neck, his head and breast bare, one hand striking aside with his blade the steel shafts as they poured on him, the other holding high above the press the Eagle of the Bonapartes.

The effort was superb.

Dense bodies of Arabs parted them in the front from the camp where the battle raged, harassed them in the rear with flying shots and hurled lances, and forced down on them on either side, like the closing jaws of a trap. The impetuosity of their onward movement was, for the moment, irresistible; it bore headlong all before it; the desert horses recoiled, and the desert riders themselves yielded, crushed, staggered, trodden aside, struck aside, by the tremendous impetus with which the Chasseurs were thrown upon them. For the moment, the Bedouins gave way, shaken and confused, as at the head of the French they saw this man, with his hair blowing in the wind, and the sun on the fairness of his face, ride down on them thus unharmed, though a dozen spears were aimed at his naked breast, dealing strokes sure as death right and left as he went, with the light from the hot blue skies on the ensign of France that he bore.

They knew him; they had met him in many conflicts; and wherever the "fair Frank," as they called him, came, there they knew of old the battle was hard to win; bitter to the bitterest end, whether that end

Then, like arrows from a hundred bows, they charged.

were defeat, or victory costly as defeat in its achievement.

And for the moment they recoiled under the shock of that fiery onslaught; for the moment they parted, and wavered and oscillated beneath the impetus with which he hurled his hundred Chasseurs on them, with that light, swift, indescribable rapidity and resistlessness of attack characteristic of the African Cavalry.

Though a score or more, one on another, had singled him out with special and violent attack, he had gone, as yet, unwounded, save for a lance-thrust in his shoulder, of which, in the heat of the conflict, he was unconscious. The "fighting fury" was upon him; and when once this had been lit in him, the Arabs knew of old that the fiercest vulture in the Frankish ranks never struck so surely home as this hand that his comrades called "*main de femme, mais main de fer.*"

As he spurred his horse down on them now, twenty blades glittered against him; the foremost would have cut straight down through the bone of his bared chest and killed him at a single lunge, but as its steel flashed in the sun, one of his troopers threw himself against it, and parried the stroke from him by sheathing it in his own breast. The blow was mortal; and the one who had saved him reeled down off his saddle under the hoofs of the trampling chargers. "*Picpon s'en souvient,*" he murmured with a smile; and, as the charge swept onward, Cecil, with a great cry of horror, saw the feet of the maddened horses strike to pulp the writhing body, and saw the black wistful eyes of the Enfant de Paris look upward to him once, with love, and fealty, and unspeakable sweetness gleaming through their darkened sight.

But to pause was impossible. Though the French horses were forced with marvelous dexterity through a

bristling forest of steel, though the remnant of the once-glittering squadron was cast against them in as headlong a daring as if it had half the regiments of the Empire at its back, the charge availed little against the hosts of the desert that had rallied and swooped down afresh almost as soon as they had been, for the instant of the shock, panic-stricken. The hatred of the opposed races was aroused in all its blind ravening passion; the conquered had the conquering nation for once at their mercy; for once at tremendous disadvantage; on neither side was there aught except that one instinct for slaughter, which, once awakened, kills every other in the breast in which it burns.

The Arabs had cruel years to avenge—years of a loathed tyranny, years of starvation and oppression, years of constant flight southward, with no choice but submission or death. They had deadly memories to wash out—memories of brethren who had been killed like carrion by the invaders' shot and steel; of nomadic freedom begrudged and crushed by civilization; of young children murdered in the darkness of the caverns, with the sulphurous smoke choking the innocent throats that had only breathed the golden air of a few summers; of women, well beloved, torn from them in the hot flames of burning tents and outraged before their eyes with insult whose end was a bayonet-thrust into their breasts—breasts whose sin was fidelity to the vanquished.

They had vengeance to do that made every stroke seem righteous and holy in their sight; that nerved each of their bare and sinewy arms as with the strength of a thousand limbs. Right—so barren, so hopeless, so unavailing—had long been with them. Now with it was added at last the power of might; and they exercised the power with the savage ruthlessness of the

desert. They closed in on every side; wheeling their swift coursers hither and thither; striking with lance and blade; hemming in, beyond escape, the doomed fragment of the Frankish squadron till there remained of them but one small nucleus, driven close together, rather as infantry will form than as cavalry usually does—a ring of horsemen, of which every one had his face to the foe; a solid circle curiously wedged one against the other, with the bodies of chargers and of men deep around them, and with the ground soaked with blood till the sand was one red morass.

Cecil held the Eagle still, and looked round on the few left to him.

"You are sons of the Old Guard: die like them."

They answered with a pealing cry, terrible as the cry of the lion in the hush of night, but a shout that had in it assent, triumph, fealty, victory, even as they obeyed him and drew up to die, while in their front was the young brow of Petit Picpon turned upward to the glare of the skies.

There was nothing for them but to draw up thus, and await their butchery, defending the Eagle to the last; looking till the last toward that "woman's face of their leader," as they had often termed it, that was to them now as the face of Napoleon was to the soldiers who loved him.

There was a pause, brief as is the pause of the lungs to take a fuller breath. The Arabs honored these men, who alone and in the midst of the hostile force, held their ground and prepared thus to be slaughtered one by one, till of all the squadron that had ridden out in the darkness of the dawn there should be only a black, huddled, stiffened heap of dead men and of dead beasts. The chief who led them pressed them back, withholding them from the end that was so near to

their hands when they should stretch that single ring of horsemen all lifeless in the dust.

"You are great warriors," he cried, in the Sabir tongue; "surrender, we will spare!"

Cecil looked back once more on the fragment of his troop, and raised the Eagle higher aloft where the wings should glisten in the fuller day. Half naked, scorched, blinded, with an open gash in his shoulder where the lance had struck, and with his brow wet with the great dews of the noon-heat and the breathless toil, his eyes were clear as they flashed with the light of the sun in them; his mouth smiled as he answered:

"Have we shown ourselves cowards, that you think we shall yield?"

A *hourrah* of wild delight from the Chasseurs he led greeted and ratified the choice: "*On meurt—on ne se rend pas!*" they shouted in the words, which, even if they be but legendary, are too true to the spirit of the soldiers of France not to be as truth in their sight. Then, with their swords above their heads, they waited for the collision of the terrible attack which would fall on them upon every side, and strike all the sentient life out of them before the sun should be one point higher in the heavens. It came: with a yell as of wild beasts in their famine, the Arabs threw themselves forward, the chief himself singling out the "fair Frank" with the violence of a lion flinging himself on a leopard. One instant longer, one flash of time, and the tribes pressing on them would have massacred them like cattle driven into the pens of slaughter. Ere it could be done, a voice like the ring of a silver trumpet echoed over the field:

"*En avant! En avant! Tue, tue, tue!*"

Above the din, the shouts, the tumult, the echoing of the distant musketry, that silvery cadence rung; down

into the midst, with the Tricolor waving above her head, the bridle of her fiery mare between her teeth, the raven of the dead Zouave flying above her head, and her pistol leveled in deadly aim, rode Cigarette.

The lightning fire of the crossing swords played round her, the glitter of the lances dazzled her eyes, the reek of smoke and of carnage was round her; but she dashed down into the heart of the conflict as gayly as though she rode at a review, laughing, shouting, waving the torn colors that she grasped, with her curls blowing back in the breeze, and her bright young face set in the warrior's lust. Behind her, by scarcely a length, galloped three squadrons of Chasseurs and Spahis; trampling headlong over the corpse-strewn field, and breaking through the masses of the Arabs as though they were seas of corn.

She wheeled her mare round by Cecil's side at the moment when with six swift passes of his blade he had warded off the Chief's blows and sent his own sword down through the chest-bones of the Bedouin's mighty form.

"Well struck! The day is turned. Charge!"

She gave the order as though she were a Marshal of the Empire, the sun-blaze full on her where she sat on the rearing, fretting, half-bred gray, with the Tricolor folds above her head, and her teeth tight gripped on the chain-bridle, and her face all glowing and warm and full of the fierce fire of war—a little Amazon in scarlet, and blue, and gold; a young Jeanne d'Arc, with the crimson fez in lieu of the silvered casque, and the gay broideries of her fantastic dress instead of the breastplate of steel. And with the Flag of her idolatry, the Flag that was as her religion, floating back as she went, she spurred her mare straight against the Arabs, straight over the lifeless forms of the hundreds

slain; and after her poured the fresh squadrons of cavalry, the ruby burnous of the Spahis streaming on the wind as their darling led them on to retrieve the day for France.

Not a bullet struck, not a saber grazed her; but there, in the heat and the press of the worst of the slaughter, Cigarette rode hither and thither, to and fro, her voice ringing like a bird's song over the field, in command, in applause, in encouragement, in delight; bearing her standard aloft and untouched; dashing heedless through a storm of blows; cheering on her "children" to the charge again and again; and all the while with the sunlight full on her radiant spirited head, and with the grim gray raven flying above her, shrieking shrilly its "*Tue, tue, tue!*" The Army believed with superstitious faith in the potent spell of that veteran bird, and the story ran that whenever he flew above a combat France was victor before the sun set. The echo of the raven's cry, and the presence of the child who, they knew, would have a thousand musket-balls fired in her fair young breast rather than live to see them defeated, made the fresh squadrons sweep in like a whirlwind, bearing down all before them.

Cigarette saved the day.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LOVE OF THE AMAZON.

Before the sun had declined from his zenith the French were masters of the field, and pursued the retreat of the Arabs till for miles along the plain the line of their flight was marked with horses that had dropped

dead in the strain, and with the motionless forms of their desert-riders, their cold hands clinched in the loose hot sands, and their stern faces turned upward to the cloudless scorch of their native skies, under whose freedom they would never again ride forth to the joyous clash of the cymbals and the fierce embrace of the death-grapple.

When at length she returned, coming in with her ruthless Spahis, whose terrible passions she feared no more than Virgil's Volscian huntress feared the beasts of forest and plain, the raven still hovered above her exhausted mare, the torn flag was still in her left hand; and the bright laughter, the flash of ecstatic triumph, was still in her face as she sang the last lines of her own war-chant. The leopard nature was roused in her. She was a soldier; death had been about her from her birth; she neither feared to give nor to receive it; she was proud as ever was young Pompeius flushed with the glories of his first eastern conquests; she was happy as such elastic, sun-lit, dauntless youth as hers alone can be, returning in the reddening after-glow at the head of her comrades to the camp that she had saved.

She could be cruel—women are, when roused, as many a revolution has shown; she could be heroic—she would have died a hundred deaths for France; she was vain with a vivacious childlike vanity; she was brave with a bravery beside which many a man's high courage palled. Cruelty, heroism, vanity, and bravery were all on fire, and all fed to their uttermost, most eager, most ardent flame, now that she came back at the head of her Spahis; while all who remained of the soldiers who, but for her, would have been massacred long ere then, without one spared among them, threw themselves forward, crowded round her, caressed, and laughed, and wept, and shouted with all the changes of

their intense mercurial temperaments, kissed her boots, her sash, her mare's drooping neck, and, lifting her, with wild vivas that rent the sky, on to the shoulders of the four tallest men among them, bore her to the presence of the only officer of high rank who had survived the terrors of the day, a Chef de Bataillon of the Zouaves.

And he, a grave and noble-looking veteran, uncovered his head and bowed before her as courtiers bow before their queens.

"Mademoiselle, you saved the honor of France. In the name of France, I thank you."

The tears rushed swift and hot into Cigarette's bright eyes—tears of joy, tears of pride. She was but a child still in much, and she could be moved by the name of France as other children by the name of their mothers.

"Chut! I did nothing," she said, rapidly. "I only rode fast."

The frenzied hurrahs of the men who heard her drowned her words. They loved her for what she had done; they loved her better still because she set no count on it.

"The Empire will think otherwise," said the Major of the Zouaves. "Tell me, my Little One, how did you do this thing?"

Cigarette, balancing herself with a foot on either shoulder of her supporters, gave the salute and answered:

"Simply, mon Commandant—very simply. I was alone, riding midway between you and the main army—three leagues, say, from each. I was all alone; only Vole-quiveut flying with me for fun. I met a colon. I knew the man. For the matter of that, I did him once a service—saved his geese and his fowls from burning, one winter's day, in their house, while he wrung his hands and looked on. Well, he was full of

terror, and told me there was fighting yonder—here he meant—so I rode nearer to see. That was just upon sunrise. I dismounted, and ran up a palm there." And Cigarette pointed to a far-off slope crowned with the remains of a once-mighty palm forest. "I got up very high. I could see miles round. I saw how things were with you. For the moment I was coming straight to you. Then I thought I should do more service if I let the main army know, and brought you a reinforcement. I rode fast. Dieu! I rode fast. My horse dropped under me twice; but I reached them at last, and I went at once to the General. He guessed at a glance how things were, and I told him to give me my Spahis and let me go. So he did. I got on a mare of his own staff, and away we came. Ma foi! it was a near thing. If we had been a minute later, it had been all up with you."

"True indeed," muttered the Zouave in his beard. "A superb action, my Little One. But did you meet no Arab scouts to stop you?"

Cigarette laughed.

"Did I not? Met them by dozens. Some had a shot at me; some had a shot from me. One fellow nearly winged me; but I got through them all somehow. Sapristi! I galloped so fast I was very hard to hit flying. These things only require a little judgment; but some men, pardi! always are creeping when they should fly, and always are scampering when they should saunter; and then they wonder when they make *fiasco!* Bah"

And Cigarette laughed again. Men were such bunglers—ouf!

"Mademoiselle, if all soldiers were like you," answered the Major of Zouaves, curtly, "to command a battalion would be paradise!"

"All soldiers would do anything I have done," retorted Cigarette, who never took a compliment at the expense of her "children." "They do not all get the opportunity, look you; *c'est tout!* Opportunity is a little angel; some catch him as he goes, some let him pass by forever. You must be quick with him, for he is like an eel to wriggle away. If you want a good soldier, take that aristocrat of the *Chasse-Marais*—that *beau Victor*. Pouf! all his officers were down; and how splendidly he led the troop! He was going to die with them rather than surrender. Napoléon"—and Cigarette uncovered her curly head reverentially as at the name of a deity—"Napoléon would have given him his brigade ere this. If you had seen him kill the chief!"

"He will have justice done him, never fear. And for you—the Cross shall be on your breast, Cigarette, if I live over to-night to write my dispatches."

And the Chef de Bataillon saluted her once more, and turned away to view the carnage-strewn plain, and number the few who remained out of those who had been wakened by the clash of the Arab arms in the gray of the earliest dawn.

Cigarette's eyes flashed like sun playing on water, and her flushed cheeks grew scarlet. Since her infancy it had been her dream to have the Cross, to have the *Grande Croix* to lie above her little lion's heart; it had been the one longing, the one ambition, the one undying desire of her soul; and lo! she touched its realization!

The wild, frantic, tumultuous cheers and caresses of her soldiery, who could not triumph in her and triumph with her enough to satiate them, recalled her to the actual moment. She sprang down from her elevation, and turned on them with a rebuke. "Ah! you are

making this fuss about me while hundreds of better soldiers than I lie yonder. Let us look to them first; we will play the fool afterward."

And, though she had ridden fifty miles that day, if she had ridden one—though she had eaten noting since sunrise, and had only had one draught of bad water—though she was tired, and stiff, and bruised, and parched with thirst, Cigarette dashed off as lightly as a young goat to look for the wounded and the dying men who strewed the plain far and near.

She remembered one whom she had not seen after that first moment in which she had given the word to the squadrons to charge.

It was a terrible sight—the arid plain, lying in the scarlet glow of sunset, covered with dead bodies, with mutilated limbs, with horses gasping and writhing, with men raving like mad creatures in the torture of their wounds. It was a sight which always went to her heart. She was a true soldier, and, though she could deal death pitilessly, could, when the delirium of war was over, tend and yield infinite compassion to those who were in suffering. But such scenes had been familiar to her from the earliest years when, on an infant's limbs, she had toddled over such battle-fields, and wound tiny hands in the hair of some dead trooper who had given her sweetmeats the hour before, vainly trying to awaken him. And she went through all the intense misery and desolation of the scene now without shrinking, and with that fearless tender devotion to the wounded which Cigarette showed in common with other soldiers of her nation, being, like them, a young lion in the combat, but a creature unspeakably gentle and full of sympathy when the fury of the fight was over.

She had seen great slaughter often enough, but even she had not seen any struggle more close, more murder-

ous, than this had been. The dead lay by hundreds; French and Arab locked in one another's limbs as they had fallen when the ordinary mode of warfare had failed to satiate their violence, and they had wrestled together like wolves fighting and rending each other over a disputed carcass. The bitterness and the hatred of the contest were shown in the fact that there were very few merely wounded or disabled; almost all of the numbers that strewed the plain were dead. It had been a battle-royal, and, but for her arrival with the fresh squadrons, not one among her countrymen would have lived to tell the story of this terrible duello which had been as magnificent in heroism as any Austerlitz or Gemappes, but which would pass unhonored, almost unnamed, among the futile fruitless heroisms of Algerian warfare.

"Is he killed? Is he killed?" she thought, as she bent over each knot of motionless bodies where here and there some faint stifled breath or some moan of agony told that life still lingered beneath the huddled stiffening heap. And a tightness came at her heart, an aching fear made her shrink, as she raised each hidden face that she had never known before. "What if he be?" she said fiercely to herself. "It is nothing to me. I hate him, the cold aristocrat. I ought to be glad if I see him lie here."

But, despite her hatred for him, she could not banish that hot feverish hope, that cold suffocating fear, which, turn by turn, quickened and slackened the bright flow of her warm young blood as she searched among the slain.

"Ah! le pauvre Picpon!" she said, softly, as she reached at last the place where the young Chasseur lay, and lifted the black curls off his forehead. The hoofs of the charging cavalry had cruelly struck and trampled his frame; the back had been broken, and the body had

been mashed as in a mortar under the thundering gallop of the Horse; but the face was still uninjured, and had a strange pathetic beauty, a calm and smiling courage on it. It was ashen pale; but the great black eyes that had glistened in such malicious mirth, and sparkled in such malignant mischief during life, were open, and had a mournful pitiful serenity in their look as if from their depths the soul still gazed—that soul which had been neglected and cursed, and left to wander among evil ways, yet which, through all its darkness, all its ignorance, had reached, unguided, to love and to nobility.

Cigarette closed their long black lashes down on the white cheeks with soft and reverent touch; she had seen that look ere now on the upturned faces of the dead who had strewn the barricades of Paris, with the words of the Marseillaise the last upon their lips.

To her there could be no fate fairer, no glory more glorious, than this of his—to die for France. And she laid him gently down, and left him, and went on with her quest.

It was here that she had lost sight of Cecil as they had charged together, and her mare, enraged and intoxicated with noise and terror, had torn away at a full speed that had outstripped even the swiftest of her Spahis. A little farther on a dog's moan caught her ear; she turned and looked across. Upright, among a ghastly pile of men and chargers, sat the small snowy poodle of the Chasseurs, beating the air with its little paws as it had been taught to do when it needed anything, and howling piteously as it begged.

"Flick-Flack? What is it, Flick-Flack?" she cried to him, while, with a bound, she reached the spot. The dog leaped on her rejoicing. The dead were thick there—ten or twelve deep—French trooper and Bedouin rider flung across each other, horribly entangled with the

limbs, the manes, the shattered bodies of their own horses. Among them she saw the face she sought as the dog eagerly ran back, caressing the hair of a soldier who lay underneath the weight of his gray charger, that had been killed by a musket-ball.

Cigarette grew very pale, as she had never grown when the hail-storm of shots had been pouring on her in the midst of a battle; but, with the rapid skill and strength she had acquired long before, she reached the place, lifted aside first one, then another, of the lifeless Arabs that had fallen above him, and drew out from beneath the suffocating pressure of his horse's weight the head and the frame of the Chasseur whom Flick-Flack had sought out and guarded.

For a moment she thought him dead; then, as she drew him out where the cooled breeze of the declining day could reach him, a slow breath, painfully drawn, moved his chest; she saw that he was unconscious from the stifling oppression under which he had been buried since the noon; an hour more without the touch of fresher air, and life would have been extinct.

Cigarette had with her the flask of brandy that she always brough on such errands as these; she forced the end between his lips, and poured some down his throat; her hand shook slightly as she did so, a weakness the gallant little campaigner never before then had known.

It revived him in a degree; he breathed more freely, though heavily, and with difficulty still; but gradually the deadly leaden color of his face was replaced by the hue of life, and his heart began to beat more loudly. Consciousness did not return to him; he lay motionless and senseless, with his head resting on her lap, and with Flick-Flack, in eager affection, licking his hands and his hair.

"He was as good as dead, Flick-Flack, if it had not been for you and me," said Cigarette, while she wetted his lips with more brandy. "Ah bah! and he would be more grateful, Flick-Flack, for a scornful scoff from Miladi!"

Still, though she thought this, she let his head lie on her lap, and, as she looked down on him, there was the glisten as of tears in the brave sunny eyes of the little Friend of the Flag.

"*Il est si beau, si beau, si beau!*" she muttered in her teeth, drawing the silk-like lock of his hair through her hands, and looking at the stricken strength, the powerless limbs, the bare chest, cut and bruised, and heaved painfully by each uneasy breath. She was of a vivid, voluptuous, artistic nature; she was thoroughly womanlike in her passions and her instincts, though she so fiercely contemned womanhood. If he had not been beautiful, she would never have looked twice at him, never once have pitied his fate.

And he was beautiful still, though his hair was heavy with dew and dust, though his face was scorched with powder, though his eyes were closed as with the leaden weight of death, and his beard was covered with the red stain of blood that had flowed from the lance-wound on his shoulder.

He was not dead; he was not even in peril of death. She knew enough of medical lore to know that it was but the insensibility of exhaustion and suffocation: and she did not care that he should waken. She drooped her head over him, moving her hand softly among the masses of his curls, and watching the quickening beatings of his heart under the bare strong nerves. Her face grew tender, and warm, and eager, and melting with a marvelous change of passionate hues. She had all the ardor of southern blood; without a wish he had

wakened in her a love that grew daily and hourly, though she would not acknowledge it. She loved to see him lie there as though he were asleep, to cheat herself into the fancy that she watched his rest to wake it with a kiss on his lips. In that unconsciousness, in that abandonment, he seemed wholly her own; passion which she could not have analyzed made her bend above him with a half-fierce, half-dreamy delight in that solitary possession of his beauty, of his life.

The restless movements of little Flick-Flack detached a piece of twine passed round his favorite's throat; the glitter of gold arrested Cigarette's eyes. She caught what the poodle's impatient caress had broken from the string; it was a small blue enamel medallion bonbon-box, with a hole through it by which it had been slung —a tiny toy once costly, now tarnished, for it had been carried through many rough scenes and many years of hardship, had been bent by blows struck at the breast against which it rested, and was clotted now with blood. Inside it was a woman's ring, of sapphires and opals.

She looked at both close in the glow of the setting sun; then passed the string through and fastened the box afresh. It was a mere trifle, but it sufficed to banish her dream, to arouse her to contemptuous impatient bitterness with that new weakness that had for the hour broken her down to the level of this feverish folly. He was beautiful—yes! She could not bring herself to hate him; she could not help the brimming tears blinding her eyes when she looked at him stretched senseless thus. But he was wedded to his past; that toy in his breast, whatever it might be, whatever tale might cling to it, was sweeter to him than her lips would ever be. Bah! there were better men than he; why had she not let him lie and die as he might under the pile of dead?

Bah! she could have killed herself for her folly! She, who had scores of lovers, from princes to pioupious, and never had a heart-ache for one of them, to go and care for a silent "*ci-devant*," who had never even noticed that her eyes had any brightness or her face had any charm!

"You deserve to be shot—you!" said Cigarette, fiercely abusing herself as she put his head off her lap, and rose abruptly and shouted to a Tringlo who was at some distance searching for the wounded. "Here is a Chasse-Marais with some breath in him," she said, curtly, as the man with his mule-cart and its sad burden of half-dead, moaning, writhing frames drew near at her summons. "Put him in. Soldiers cost too much training, to waste them on jackals and kites, if one can help it. Lift him up—quick!"

"He is badly hurt?" said the Tringlo.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, no! I have had worse scratches myself. The horse fell on him, that was the mischief. Most of them here have swallowed the '*petite pilule d'oubli*' once and for all. I never saw a prettier thing—every Lascar has killed his own little knot of Arbicos. Look how nice and neat they lie."

Cigarette glanced over the field with the satisfied appreciation of a dilettante glancing over a Soltikoff or Blacas collection unimpeachable for accuracy and arrangement; and drank a toss of her brandy, and lighted her little amber pipe, and sang loudly as she did so the gayest ballad of the Langue Verte.

She was not going to have him imagine she cared for that Chasseur whom he lifted up on his little wagon with so kindly a care—not she! Cigarette was as proud in her way as was ever the Princess Venetia Corona.

Nevertheless, she kept pace with the mules, carrying little Flick-Flack, and never paused on her way, though she passed scores of dead Arabs, whose silver ornaments and silk broideries, commonly after such a fantasia, replenished the knapsack and adorned in profusion the uniform of the young filibuster, being gleaned by her, right and left, as her lawful harvest after the fray.

"Leave him there. I will have a look at him," she said, at the first empty tent they reached. The camp had been the scene of as fierce a struggle as the part of the plain which the cavalry had held, and it was strewn with the slaughter of Zouaves and Tirailleurs. The Tringlo obeyed her, and went about his errand of mercy. Cigarette, left alone with the wounded man, lying insensible still on a heap of forage, ceased her song, and grew very quiet. She had a certain surgical skill, learnt as her untutored genius learned most things, with marvelous rapidity, by observation and intuition; and she had saved many a life by her knowledge and her patient attendance on the sufferers—patience that she had been famed for when she had been only six years old, and a surgeon of the Algerian regiments had affirmed that he could trust her to be as wakeful, as watchful, and as sure to obey his directions as though she were a Sœur de Charité. Now "the little fagot of opposites," as Cecil had called her, put this skill into active use.

The tent had been a scullion's tent; the poor *marmiton* had been killed, and lay outside, with his head clean severed by an Arab flissa; his fire had gone out, but his brass pots and pans, his jar of fresh water, and his various preparations for the General's dinner were still there. The General was dead also; far yonder, where he had fallen in the van of his Zouaves, exposing himself with all the splendid reckless gallantry of

France; and the soup stood unserved, the wild plovers were taken by Flick-Flack, the empty dishes waited for the viands which there were no hands to prepare and no mouths to eat. Cigarette glanced round, and saw all with one flash of her eyes; then she knelt down beside the heap of forage, and, for the first thing, dressed his wounds with the cold, clear water, and washed away the dust and the blood that covered his breast.

"He is too good a soldier to die; one must do it for France," she said to herself, in a kind of self-apology. And as she did it, and bound the lance-gash close, and bathed his breast, his forehead, his hair, his beard, free from the sand, and the powder, and the gore, a thousand changes swept over her mobile face. It was one moment soft, and flushed, and tender as passion; it was the next jealous, fiery, scornful, pale, and full of impatient self-disdain.

He was nothing to her—morbleu! He was an aristocrat, and she was a child of the people. She had been besieged by dukes, and had flouted princes; she had borne herself in such gay liberty, such vivacious freedom, such proud and careless sovereignty—bah! what was it to her whether this man lived or died? If she saved him, he would give her a low bow as he thanked her, thinking all the while of Miladi!

And yet she went on with her work.

Cecil had been stunned by a stroke from his horse's hoof as the poor beast fell beneath and rolled over him. His wounds were slight—marvelously so for the thousand strokes that had been aimed at him; but it was difficult to arouse him from unconsciousness, and his face was white as death where he lay on the heap of dry reeds and grasses. She began to feel fear of that lengthened syncope; a chill, tight, despairing fear that she had never known in her life before. She knelt

silent a moment, drawing through her hand the wet locks of his hair with the bright threads of gold gleaming in it.

Then she started up, and, leaving him, found a match, and lighted the died-out wood afresh; the fire soon blazed up, and she warmed above it the soup that had grown cold, poured into it some red wine that was near, and forced some, little by little, down his throat. It was with difficulty at first that she could pass any through his tightly locked teeth; but by degrees she succeeded, and, only half conscious still, he drank it faster, the heat and the strength reviving him as its stimulant warmed his veins. His eyes did not unclose, but he stirred, moved his limbs, and, with some muttured words she could not hear, drew a deeper breath and turned.

"He will sleep now—he is safe," she thought to herself while she stood watching him with a curious conflict of pity, impatience, anger, and relief at war within her.

Bah! Why was she always doing good services to this man, who only cared for the blue serene eyes of a woman who would never give him aught except pain? Why should she take such care to keep the fire of vitality alight in him, when it had been crushed out in thousands as good as he, who would have no notice save a hasty thrust into the earth, no funeral chant except the screech of the carrion-birds?

Cigarette had been too successful in her rebellion against all weakness, and was far too fiery a young warrior to find refuge or consolation in the poet's plea,

> How is it under our control to love or not to love?

To allow anything to gain ascendency over her that she resisted, to succumb to any conqueror that was unbid-

den and unwelcome, was a submission beyond words degrading to the fearless soldier-code of the Friend of the Flag. And yet—there she stayed and watched him. She took some food, for she had been fasting all day; then she dropped down before the fire she had lighted, and, in one of those soft, curled, kitten-like attitudes that were characteristic of her, kept her vigil over him.

She was bruised, stiff, tired, longing like a tired child to fall asleep; her eyes felt hot as flame, her rounded supple limbs were aching, her throat was sore with long thirst and the sand that she seemed to have swallowed till no draught of water or wine would take the scorched, dry pain out of it. But, as she had given up her fête-day in the hospital, so she sat now—as patient in the self-sacrifice as she was impatient when the vivacious agility of her young frame was longing for the frenzied delights of the dance or the battle.

Yonder she knew, where her Spahis bivouacked on the hard-won field, there were riotous homages, wild applause, intoxicated triumph waiting for the Little One who had saved the day, if she chose to go out for it; and she loved to be the center of such adoration and rejoicing with all the exultant vanity of a child and a hero in one. Here there were warmth of flames, quietness of rest, long hours for slumber, all that her burning eyes and throbbing nerves were longing for, as the sleep she would not yield to stole on her, and the racking pain of fatigue cramped her bones. But she would not go to the pleasure without, and she would not give way to the weariness that tortured her.

Cigarette could crucify self with a generous courage, all the purer because it never occurred to her that there was anything of virtue or of sacrifice in it. She was acting *en bon soldat*—that was all. Pouf! that wanted no thanks.

Silence settled over the camp; half the slain could not be buried, and the clear luminous stars rose on the ghastly plateau. All that were heard were the challenge of sentinels, the tramp of patrols. The guard visited her once: "*C'est Cigarette*," she said, briefly, and she was left undisturbed.

She kept herself awake in the little dark tent, only lit by the glow of the fire. Dead men were just without, and in the moonlight without, as the night came on, she could see the severed throat of the scullion, and the head farther off, like a round gray stone. But that was nothing to Cigarette; dead men were no more to her than dead trees are to others.

Every now and then, four or five times in an hour, she gave him whom she tended the soup or the wine that she kept warmed for him over the embers. He took it without knowledge, sunk half in lethargy, half in sleep; but it kept the life glowing in him which, without it, might have perished of cold and exhaustion as the chills and northerly wind of the evening succeeded to the heat of the day, and pierced through the canvas walls of the tent. It was very bitter; more keenly felt because of the previous burning of the sun. There was no cloak or covering to fling over him; she took off her blue cloth tunic and threw it across his chest, and, shivering despite herself, curled closer to the little fire.

She did not know why she did it—he was nothing to her—and yet she kept herself wide awake through the dark autumn night, lest he should sigh or stir and she not hear him.

"I have saved his life twice," she thought, looking at him; "beware of the third time, they say!"

He moved restlessly, and she went to him. His face was flushed now; his breath came rapidly and shortly;

there was some fever on him. The linen was displaced from his wounds; she dipped it again in water, and laid the cooled bands on them. "Ah, bah! If I were not unsexed enough for this, how would it be with you now?" she said in her teeth. He tossed wearily to and fro; detached words caught her ear as he muttered them:

"Let it be, let it be—he is welcome! How could I prove it at his cost? I saved him—I could do that. It was not much——"

She listened with intent anxiety to hear the other whispers ending the sentence, but they were stifled and broken.

"*Tiens!*" she murmured below her breath. "It is for some other he has ruined himself."

She could not catch the words that followed. They were in an unknown language to her, for she knew nothing of English, and they poured fast and obscure from his lips as he moved in feverish unrest; the wine that had saved him from exhaustion inflaming his brain in his sleep. Now and then French phrases crossed the English ones; she leaned down to seize their meaning till her cheek was against his forehead, till her lips touched his hair; and at that half caress her heart beat, her face flushed, her mouth trembled with a too vivid joy, with an impulse, half fear and half longing, that had never so moved her before.

"If I had my birthright," he muttered in her own tongue. "If I had it—would she look so cold then? She might love me—women used once. O, God! if *she* had not looked on me, I had never known all I have lost!"

Cigarette started as if a knife had stabbed her, and sprang up from her rest beside him.

"She—she—always she!" she muttered fiercely,

while her face grew duskily scarlet in the fire-glow of the tent; and she went slowly away, back to the low wood fire.

This was to be ever her reward!

Her eyes glistened and flashed with the fiery vengeful passions of her hot and jealous instincts. Cigarette had in her the violence as she had the nobility of a grand nature that has gone wholly untutored and unguided; and she had the power of southern vengeance in her, though she had also the swift and rapid impulse to forgiveness of a generous and sunlit temper. It was bitter, beyond any other bitterness that could have wounded her, for the spoilt, victorious, imperious, little empress of the Army of Algeria, to feel that, though she had given his life twice back to this man, she was less to him than the tiny white dog that nestled in his breast; that she who never before had endured a slight, or known what neglect could mean, gave care, and pity, and aid, and even tenderness, to one whose only thought was for a woman who had accorded him nothing but a few chill syllables of haughty condescension!

He lay there unconscious of her presence, tossing wearily to and fro in fevered unrefreshing sleep, murmuring incoherent words of French and English strangely mingled; and Cigarette crouched on the ground, with the firelight playing all over her picturesque, childlike beauty, and her large eyes strained and savage, yet with a strange mistful pain in them, looking out at the moonlight where the headless body lay in a cold gray sea of shadow.

Yet she did not leave him.

She was too generous for that. "What is right is right. He is a soldier of France," she muttered, while she kept her vigil. She felt no want of sleep; a hard

hateful wakefulness seemed to have banished all rest from her; she stayed there all the night through. Whenever she could ease or aid him she rose and did so, with the touch of water on his forehead, or of cooled wine to his lips, by the alteration of the linen on his wounds, or the shifting of the rough forage that made his bed. But she did it without anything of that loving lingering attendance she had given before; she never once drew out the task longer than it needed, or let her hands wander among his hair, or over his lips, as she had done before.

And he never once was conscious of it; he never once knew that she was near. He did not waken from the painful, delirious, stupefied slumber that had fallen on him; he only vaguely felt that he was suffering pain; he only vaguely dreamed of what he murmured of—his past, and the beauty of the woman who had brought all the memories of that past back on him.

And this was Cigarette's reward—to hear him mutter wearily of the proud eyes and of the lost smile of another!

The dawn came at last; her constant care and the skill with which she had cooled and dressed his wounds had done him infinite service; the fever had subsided, and toward morning his incoherent words ceased, his breathing grew calmer and more tranquil; he fell asleep —sleep that was profound, dreamless, and refreshing.

She looked at him with a tempestuous shadow darkening her face that yet was soft with a tenderness that she could not banish. She hated him; she ought to have stabbed or shot him rather than have tended him thus; he neglected her, and only thought of that woman of his old Order. As a daughter of the People, as a child of the Army, as a soldier of France, she ought to have killed him rather than have caressed his hair and soothed

his pain! Pshaw! She ground one in another her tiny white teeth, that were like a spaniel's.

Then gently, very gently, lest she should waken him, she took her tunic skirt with which she had covered him from the chills of the night, put more broken wood on the fading fire, and with a last lingering look at him where he slept, passed out from the tent as the sun rose in a flushed and beautiful dawn. He would never know that she had saved him thus: he never should know it, she vowed in her heart.

Cigarette was very haughty in her own wayward, careless fashion. At a word of love from him, at a kiss from his lips, at a prayer from his voice, she would have given herself to him in all the abandonment of a first passion, and have gloried in being known as his mistress. But she would have perished by a thousand deaths rather than have sought him through his pity or through his gratitude; rather than have accepted the compassion of a heart that gave its warmth to another; rather than have ever let him learn that he was any more to her than all their other countless comrades who filled up the hosts of Africa.

"He will never know," she said to herself, as she passed through the disordered camp, and in a distant quarter coiled herself among the hay of a forage-wagon, and covered up in dry grass, like a bird in a nest, let her tired limbs lie and her aching eyes close in repose. She was very tired; and every now and then as she slept a quick sobbing breath shook her as she slumbered, like a worn-out fawn who has been wounded while it played.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LEATHERN ZACKRIST.

With the *réveillé* and the break of morning Cigarette woke, herself again ; she gave a little petulant shake to her fairy form when she thought of what folly she had been guilty. "Ah, bah ! you deserve to be shot," she said to herself afresh. "One would think you were a Silver Pheasant—you grow such a little fool !"

Love was all very well, so Cigarette's philosophy had always reckoned ; a chocolate bonbon, a firework, a bagatelle, a draught of champagne, to flavor an idle moment. "*Vin et Vénus*" she had always been accustomed to see worshiped together, as became their alliterative ; it was a bit of fun—that was all. A passion that had pain in it had never touched the Little One ; she had disdained it with lightest, airest contumely. "If your sweetmeat has a bitter almond in it, eat the sugar and throw the almond away, you goose ! that is simple enough, isn't it ? Bah ! I don't pity the people who eat the bitter almond ; not I—*ce sont bien bêtes, ces gens !*" she had said once, when arguing with an officer on the absurdity of a melancholy love that possessed him, and whose sadness she rallied most unmercifully. Now, for once in her young life, the Child of France found that it was remotely possible to meet with almonds so bitter that the taste will remain and taint all things, do what philosophy may to throw its acridity aside.

With the *réveillé* she awoke, herself again, though she had not had more than an hour's slumber—awoke, it is true, with a dull ache at her heart that was very

new and bitterly unwelcome to her, but with the buoyant vivacity and the proud carelessness of her nature in arms against it, and with that gayety of childhood inherent to her repelling, and very nearly successfully, the foreign depression that weighed on it.

Her first thought was to take care that he should never learn what she had done for him. The Princess Corona would not have more utterly disdained to solicit regard through making a claim upon gratitude than the fiery little warrior of France would have done. She went straight to the Tringlo who had known her at her mission of mercy.

"Georges, *mon brave*," said the Little One, with that accent of authority which was as haughty as any General's, "do you know how that Chasseur is that we brought in last night?"

"Not heard, ma belle," said the cheery little Tringlo, who was hard pressed; for there was much to be done, and he was very busy.

"What is to be done with the wounded?"

Georges lifted his eyebrows:

"Ma belle! there are very few. There are hundreds oi dead. It was a duel *à outrance* yesterday. The few there are we shall take with an escort of Spahis to headquarters."

"Good. I will go with you. Have a heed, Georges, never to whisper that I had anything to do with saving that man I called to you about."

"And why, my Little One?"

"Because *I* desire you!" said Cigarette, with her most imperious emphasis. "They say he is English, and a ruined Milord, pardieu! Now, I would not have an Englishman think I sought his six feet of carcass worth saving for a ransom."

The Tringlo chuckled; he was an Anglophobist. In

the Chinese expedition his share of "loot" had been robbed from him by a trick of which two English soldiers had been the concoctors, and a vehement animosity against the whole British race had been the fruit of it in him.

"*Non, non, non!*" he answered her, heartily. "I understand. Thou art very right, Cigarette. If we have ever obliged an Englishman, he thinks his obligation to us opens him a neat little door through which to cheat us. It is very dangerous to oblige the English; they always hate you for it. That is their way. They may have virtues; they may," he added, dubiously, but with an impressive air of strictest impartiality, "but among them is not written gratitude. Ask that man, Rac, how they treat their soldiers!" and M. Georges hurried away to his mules and his duties, thinking with loving regret of the delicious Chinese plunder of which the dogs of Albion had deprived him.

"He is safe!" thought Cigarette; of the patrol who had seen her she was not afraid—he had never noticed with whom she was when he had put his head into the scullion's tent; and she made her way toward the place where she had left him, to see how it went with this man whom she was so careful should never know that which he had owed to her.

It went well with him, thanks to her; care, and strengthening nourishment, and the skill of her tendance had warded off all danger from his wound. The bruise and pressure from the weight of the horse had been more ominous, and he could not raise himself or even breathe without severe pain; but his fever had left him, and he had just been lifted into a mule-drawn ambulance-wagon as Cigarette reached the spot.

"How goes the day, Monsieur Victor? So you got

sharp scratches, I hear? Ah! that was a splendid thing we had yesterday! When did you go down? We charged together!" she cried gayly to him; then her voice dropped suddenly, with an indescribable sweetness and change of tone. "So!—you suffer still?" she asked, softly.

Coming close up to where he lay on the straw, she saw the exhausted languor of his regard, the heavy darkness under his eyelids, the effort with which his lips moved as the faint words came broken through them.

"Not very much, *ma belle*, I thank you. I shall be fit for harness in a day or two. Do not let them send me into hospital. I shall be perfectly—well—soon."

Cigarette swayed herself upon the wheel and leaned toward him, touching and changing his bandages with clever hands:

"They have dressed your wound ill; whose doing is that?"

"It is nothing. I have been half cut to pieces before now; this is a mere bagatelle. It is only——"

"That it hurts you to breathe? I know! Have they given you anything to eat this morning?"

"No. Everything is in confusion. We——"

She did not stay for the conclusion of his sentence; she had darted off, quick as a swallow. She knew what she had left in her dead scullion's tent. Everything was in confusion, as he had said. Of the few hundreds that had been left after the terrific onslaught of the past day, some were employed far out, thrusting their own dead into the soil; others were removing the tents and all the equipage of the camp; others were busied with the wounded, of whom the greatest sufferers were to be borne to the nearest hospital (that nearest many leagues away over the wild and barren country); while those who were likely to be again soon ready for service were

to be escorted to the headquarters of the main army. Among the latter Cecil had passionately entreated to be numbered; his prayer was granted to the man who had kept at the head of his Chasseurs and borne aloft the Tricolor through the whole of the war-tempest on which the dawn had risen, and which had barely lulled and sunk by the setting of the sun. Châteauroy was away with the other five of his squadrons; and the Zouave chef-de-bataillon, the only officer of any rank who had come alive through the conflict, had himself visited Bertie, and given him warm words of eulogy, and even of gratitude, that had soldierly sincerity and cordiality in them.

"Your conduct was magnificent," he had said, as he had turned away. "It shall be my care that it is duly reported and rewarded."

Cigarette was but a few seconds absent; she soon bounded back like the swift little chamois she was, bringing with her a huge bowlful of red wine with bread broken in it.

"This is the best I could get," she said; "it is better than nothing. It will strengthen you."

"What have you had yourself, *petite?*"

"Ah-bah! Leave off thinking for others; I have breakfasted long ago," she answered him. (She had only eaten a biscuit well-nigh as hard as a flint.) "Take it—here, I will hold it for you."

She perched herself on the wheel like a bird on a twig; she had a bird's power of alighting and sustaining herself on the most difficult and most airy elevation; but Cecil turned his eyes on the only soldier in the cart beside himself, one of the worst men in his regiment—a murderous, sullen, black-browed, evil wretch, fitter for the bench of the convict-galley than for the ranks of the cavalry.

"Give half to Zackrist," he said. "I know no hunger; and he has more need of it."

"Zackrist! that is the man who stole your lance and accouterments, and got you into trouble by taking them to pawn in your name, a year and more ago."

"Well, what of that? He is not the less hungry."

"What of that? Why, you were going to be turned into the First Battalion* disgraced for the affair, because you would not tell of him; if Vireflou had not found out the rights of the matter in time!"

"What has that to do with it?"

"This, Monsieur Victor, that you are a fool."

"I dare say I am. But that does not make Zackrist less hungry."

He took the bowl from her hands, and emptying a little of it into the wooden *bidon* that hung to her belt, kept that for himself and stretching his arm across the straw, gave the bowl to Zackrist, who had watched it with the longing ravenous eyes of a starving wolf, and seized it with rabid avidity.

A smile passed over Cecil's face, amused despite the pain he suffered.

"That is one of my 'sensational tricks,' as M. de Châteauroy calls them. Poor Zackrist! did you see his eyes?"

"A jackal's eyes, yes!" said Cigarette, who, between her admiration for the action and her impatience at the waste of her good bread and wine, hardly knew whether to applaud or to deride him. "What recompense do you think you will get? He will steal your things again, first chance."

"May be. I don't think he will. But he is very

* The battalion of the criminal outcasts of all corps, whether horse or foot, answering to the *Straf bataillons* of the Austrian service.

hungry all the same; that is about the only question just now," he answered her as he drank and ate his portion, with a need of it that could willingly have made him take thrice as much, though for the sake of Zackrist he had denied his want of it.

The Zackrist himself, who could hear perfectly what was said, uttered no word; but when he had finished the contents of the bowl, lay looking at his corporal with an odd gleam in the dark sullen savage depths of his hollow eyes. He was not going to say a word of thanks; no!—none had ever heard a grateful or a decent word from him in his life; he was proud of that. He was the most foul-mouthed brute in the army, and, like *Snake* in the *School for Scandal*, thought a good action would have ruined his character forever. Nevertheless there came into his cunning and ferocious eyes a glisten of the same light which had been in the little *gamin's* when first by the bivouac fire he had murmured, "*Picpon s'en souviendra.*"

"When anybody stole from me," muttered Cigarette, "I shot him."

"You would have fed him had he been starving. Do not belie yourself, Cigarette; you are too generous ever to be vindictive."

"Pooh! Revenge is one's right."

"I doubt that. We are none of us good enough to claim it, at any rate."

Cigarette shrugged her shoulders in silence; then poising herself on the wheel, she sprang from thence on to the back of her little mare which she had brought up, having the reins in one of her hands and the wine-bowl in the other, and was fresh and bright after the night's repose.

"I will ride with you, with my Spahis," she said, as a young queen might have promised protection from

her escort. He thanked her, and sank back among the straw, exhausted and worn out with pain and with languor; the weight that seemed to oppress his chest was almost as hard to bear as when the actual pressure of his dead charger's body had been on him.

Yet, as he had said, it was but a bagatelle beside the all but mortal wounds, the agonizing neuralgia, the prostrating fever, the torture of bullet-torn nerves, and the scorching fire of inflamed sword wounds that had in their turn been borne by him in his twelve years of African service—things which, to men who have never suffered them, sound like the romanced horrors of an exaggerated imagination; yet things which are daily and quietly borne, by such soldiers as the soldiers of the Algerian Army, as the natural accompaniments of a military life—borne, too, in brave simple unconscious heroism by men who know well that the only reward for it will be their own self-contentment at having been true to the traditions of their regiment.

Four other troopers were placed on the straw beside him, and the mule carts with their mournful loads rolled slowly out of camp eastward toward the quarters of the main army; the Spahis, glowing red against the sun, escorting them, with their darling in their midst, while from their deep chests they shouted war songs in Sabir with all the wild and riotous delight that the triumph of victory and the glow of bloodshed roused in those who combined in them the fire of France and the fanaticism of Islamism—an irresistible union.

Though the nights were now cold, and before long even the advent of snow might be looked for, the days were hot and even scorching still. Cigarette and her Spahis took no heed of it; they were desert born and bred; and she was well-nigh invulnerable to heat as any little salamander. But, although they were screened as

well as they could be under an improvised awning, the wounded men suffered terribly. Gnats and mosquitoes and all the winged things of the African air tormented them, and tossing on the dry hot straw they grew delirious, some falling asleep and murmuring incoherently, others lying with wide-open eyes of half-senseless straining misery. Cigarette had known well how it would be with them; she had accompanied such escorts many a time; and ever and again when they halted she dismounted and came to them, and mixed wine with some water that she had slung a barrel of to her saddle, and gave it to them, and moved their bandages, and spoke to them with a soft caressing consolation that pacified them as if by some magic. She had led them like a young lion on to the slaughter in the past day; she soothed them now with a gentleness that the gentlest daughter of the Church could not have surpassed.

The way was long; the road ill formed, leading for the most part across a sear and desolate country, with nothing to relieve its barrenness except long stretches of the great spear-headed reeds. At noon the heat was intense; the little cavalcade halted for half an hour under the shade of some black towering rocks which broke the monotony of the district, and commenced a more hilly and more picturesque portion of the country. Cigarette came to the side of the temporary ambulance in which Cecil was placed. He was asleep—sleeping for once peacefully with little trace of pain upon his features, as he had slept the previous night. She saw that his face and chest had not been touched by the stinging insect-swarm; he was doubly screened by a shirt hung above him dextrously on some bent sticks.

"Who has done that?" thought Cigarette. As she glanced round she saw:—without any linen to cover him, Zackrist had reared himself up and leaned slightly

forward over against his comrade. The shirt that protected Cecil was his; and on his own bare shoulders and mighty chest the tiny armies of the flies and gnats were fastened, doing their will uninterrupted.

As he caught her glance, a sullen ruddy glow of shame shone through the black hard skin of his sunburnt visage—shame to which he had been never touched when discovered in any one of his guilty and barbarous actions.

"Dame!" he growled, savagely; "he gave me his wine; one must do something in return. Not that I feel the insects—not I; my skin is leather, see you! they can't get through it; but his is *une peau de femme* —white and soft—bah! like tissue-paper!"

"I see, Zackrist; you are right. A French soldier can never take a kindness from an English fellow without outrunning him in generosity. Look—here is some drink for you."

She knew too well the strange nature with which she had to deal to say a syllable of praise to him for his self-devotion, or to appear to see that, despite his boast of his leather skin, the stings of the cruel winged tribes were drawing his blood and causing him alike pain and irritation which, under that sun, and added to the torment of his gunshot-wound, were a martyrdom as great as the noblest saint ever endured.

"*Tiens—tiens!* I did him wrong," murmured Cigarette. "That is what they are—the children of France —even when they are at their worst, like that devil, Zackrist. Who dare say they are not the heroes of the world?"

And all through the march she gave Zackrist a double portion of her water dashed with red wine, that was so welcome and so precious to the parched and aching throats; and all through the march Cecil lay asleep,

and the man who had thieved from him, the man whose soul was stained with murder, and pillage, and rapine, sat erect beside him, letting the insects suck his veins and pierce his flesh.

It was only when they drew near the camp of the main army that Zackrist beat off the swarm and drew his old shirt over his head. "You do not want to say anything to him," he muttered to Cigarette. "I am of leather, you know; I have not felt it."

She nodded; she understood him. Yet his shoulders and his chest were well-nigh flayed, despite the tough and horny skin of which he made his boast.

"Dieu! we are droll!" mused Cigarette. "If we do a good thing, we hide it as if it were a bit of stolen meat, we are so afraid it should be found out; but, if they do one in the world there, they bray it at the tops of their voices from the houses' roofs, and run all down the streets screaming about it for fear it should be lost. Dieu! we are droll!"

And she dashed the spurs into her mare and galloped off at the height of her speed into camp—a very city of canvas, buzzing with the hum of life, regulated with the marvelous skill and precision of French warfare, yet with the carelessness and the picturesqueness of the desert-life pervading it.

"*C'est la Cigarette!*" ran from mouth to mouth as the bay mare with her little Amazon rider, followed by the scarlet cloud of the Spahis, all ablaze like poppies in the sun, rose in sight, thrown out against the azure of the skies.

What she had done had been told long before by an orderly, riding hard in the early night to take the news of the battle; and the whole host was on watch for its darling—the savior of the honor of France. Like wave rushing on wave of some tempestuous ocean, the men

swept out to meet her in one great surging tide of life, impetuous, passionate, idolatrous, exultant, with all the vivid ardor, all the uncontrolled emotion, of natures south-born, sun-nurtured. They broke away from their mid-day rest as from their military toil, moved as by one swift breath of fire, and flung themselves out to meet her, the chorus of a thousand voices ringing in deafening vivas to the skies. She was enveloped in that vast sea of eager furious lives, in that dizzy tumult of vociferous cries, and stretching hands, and upturned faces. As her soldiers had done the night before, so these did now—kissing her hands, her dress, her feet, sending her name in thunder through the sunlit air, lifting her from off her horse, and bearing her, in a score of stalwart arms, triumphant in their midst.

She was theirs—their own—the Child of the Army, the Little One whose voice above their dying brethren had the sweetness of an angel's song, and whose feet, in their hours of revelry, flew like the swift and dazzling flight of gold-winged orioles. And she had saved the honor of their Eagles; she had given to them and to France their god of Victory. They loved her—oh, God, how they loved her!—with that intense, breathless, intoxicating love of a multitude which, though it may stone to-morrow what it adore to-day, has yet for those on whom it has once been given thus a power no other love can know—a passion unutterably sad, deliriously strong.

That passion moved her strangely.

As she looked down upon them, she knew that not one man breathed among that tumultuous mass but would have died that moment at her word; not one mouth moved among that countless host but breathed her name in pride, and love, and honor.

She might be a careless young coquette, a lawless

little brigand, a child of sunny caprices, an elf of dauntless mischief; but she was more than these. The divine fire of genius had touched her, and Cigarette would have perished for her country not less surely than Jeanne d'Arc. The holiness of an impersonal love, the glow of an imperishable patriotism, the melancholy of a passionate pity for the concrete and unnumbered sufferings of the people were in her, instinctive and inborn, as fragrance in the heart of flowers. And all these together moved her now, and made her young face beautiful as she looked down upon the crowding soldiery.

"It was nothing," she answered them—"it was nothing. It was for France."

For France! They shouted back the beloved word with tenfold joy; and the great sea of life beneath her tossed to and fro in stormy triumph, in frantic paradise of victory, ringing her name with that of France upon the air, in thunder-shouts like spears of steel smiting on shields of bronze.

But she stretched her hand out, and swept it backward to the desert-border of the south with a gesture that had awe for them.

"Hush!" she said, softly, with an accent in her voice that hushed the riot of their rejoicing homage till it lulled like the lull in a storm. "Give me no honor while *they* sleep yonder. With the dead lies the glory!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

BY THE BIVOUAC FIRE.

Le Roi Gaillard qui s'appelle la Guerre,
C'est mon souverain tout débonnair;
Au bouche qui rit, au main qui tue,
Au front d'airain, aux yeux de feu!
Comme il est beau ce roi si gai,
Qui fait le diable à quatre au gré,
Qui brûle, qui boit, qui foudre, qui fume,
Qui aime le vin, le sang, l'écume,
Qui jette la torche——

"HOLA! NOUS V'LA!" cried Cigarette, interrupting herself in her chant in honor of the attributes of war, as the Tringlo's mules which she was driving some three weeks after the fray of Zaraila, stopped, by sheer force of old habit, in the middle of a green plateau on the outskirts of a camp pitched in its center, and overlooked by brown rugged scarps of rock, with stunted bushes on their summits, and with here and there a maritime pine clinging to their naked slopes. At sight of the food-laden little beasts, and the well-known form behind them, the Tirailleurs, Indigènes, and the Zouaves, on whose side of the encampment she had approached, rushed toward her with frantic shouts, and wild delight, and vehement hurrahs in a tempest of vociferous welcome that might have stunned any ears less used, and startled any nerves less steeled, to military life than the Friend of the Flag's. She signed back the shouting disorderly crowd with her mule-whip, as superbly as though she were a Marshal of France signing back a whole army's mutiny.

"What children you are! You push, and scramble,

and tear, like a set of monkeys over a nut. Get out of my way, or I swear you shall none of you have so much as a morsel of black bread—do you hear!"

It was amusing to see how they minded her contemptuous orders; how these black-bearded fire-eaters, the terror of the country, each one of whom could have crushed her in his grasp as a wolf crushes a lamb, slunk back, silenced and obedient, before the imperious bidding of the little vivandière. They had heeded her and let her rule over them almost as much when she had been seven years old, and her curls, now so dark, had been yellow as corn in the sun.

"Ouf!" growled only one insubordinate, "if you had been a day and night eating nothing but a bit of moist clay, *you* might be hungry too, *fanfan.*"

The humiliated supplication of the reply appeased their autocratic sovereign. She nodded her head in assent.

"I know; I know. I have gone days on a handful of barley-ears. M. le Colonel has his *marmitons,* and his *fricassées,* and his *batterie de cuisine* where he camps—ho-hé!—but we soldiers have nothing but a hunch of baked chaff. Well, we win battles on it—eh? '*Quand la panse est vide, l'épée mange vite!*'"

Which was one of the impromptu proverbs that Cigarette was wont to manufacture and bring into her discourse with an air of authority as of one who quotes from profound scholastic lore. It was received with a howl of applause and of ratification. The entrails often gnaw with bitter pangs of famine in the Army of Algiers, and they knew well how sharp an edge hunger gives to the steel.

Nevertheless, the sullen angry roar of famished men, that is so closely, so terribly like the roar of wild beasts, did not cease.

"Where is Biribi?" they growled. "Biribi never keeps us waiting. Those are Biribi's beasts."

"Right," said Cigarette, laconically, with a crack of her mule-whip on to the arm of a Zouave who was attempting to make free with her convoy and purloin a loaf off the load.

"Where is Biribi, then?" they roared in concert, a crowd of eager, wolfish, ravenous, impatient men, hungry as camp fasting could make them, and half inclined even to tear their darling in pieces, since she kept them thus from the stores.

Cigarette uncovered her head with a certain serious grace very rare in her.

"Biribi has made a good end."

Her assailants grew very quiet.

"Shot?" they asked briefly. Biribi was a Tringlo well beloved in all the battalions.

Cigarette nodded, with a gesture outward to the solitary country. She was accustomed to these incidents of war; she thought of them no more than a girl of civilized life thinks of the grouse or the partridges that are killed by her lovers and brothers.

"I was out yonder, two leagues or more away. I was riding; I was on my own horse; Etoile-Filante. Well, I heard shots; of course I made for the place by my ear. Before I got up I saw what was the mischief. There were the mules in a gorge, and Biribi in front of them, fighting, mon Dieu!—fighting like the devil—with three Arbis upon him. They were trying to stop the convoys, and Biribi was beating them back with all his might. I was too far off to do much good; but I shouted and dashed down to them. The Arbis heard, Biribi heard; he flew on to them like a tiger, that little Tringlo. It was wonderful! Two fell dead under him; the third took fright and fled. When I got up, Biribi

lay above the dead brutes with a dozen wounds in him, if there were one. He looked up, and knew me. 'Is it thee, Cigarette?' he asked; and he could hardly speak for the blood in his throat. 'Do not wait with me; I am dead already. Drive the mules into camp as quick as thou canst; the men will be thinking me late.'"

"Biribi was always *bon enfant*," muttered the listening throng; they forgot their hunger as they heard.

"Ah, *chenapans!* he thought more of you than you deserve, you jackals! I drew him aside into a hole in the rocks out of the heat. He was dead; he was right. No man could live slashed about like that. The Arbicos had set on him as he went singing along; if he would have given up the brutes and the stores, they would not have harmed him; but that was not Biribi. I did all I could for him. Dame! it was no good. He lay very still for some minutes with his head on my lap; then he moved restlessly and tossed about. 'They will think me so late—so late,' he muttered; 'and they are famished by this. There is that letter, too, from his mother for Petit-Pot-de-Terre; there is all that news from France; I have so much for them, and I shall be so late—so late!' All he thought was that he should be so late into camp. Well, it was all over very soon. I do not think he suffered; but he was so afraid you should not have the food. I left him in the cave, and drove the mules on as he asked. Etoile-Filante had galloped away; have you seen him home?"

There broke once more from the hearkening throng a roar that shook the echoes from the rocks; but it was not now the rage of famished longing, but the rage of the lust for vengeance, and the grief of passionate hearts blent together. Quick as the lightning flashes, their swords leaped from their scabbards and shook in the sun-lighted air.

"We will avenge him!" they shouted as with one throat, the hoarse cry rolling down the valley like a swell of thunder. If the bonds of discipline had loosed them, they would have rushed forth on the search and to the slaughter, forgetful of hunger, of heat, of sunstroke, of self-pity, of all things, save the dead Tringlo, whose only fear in death had been lest they should want and suffer through him.

Their adjutants, alarmed by the tumult, hurried to the spot, fearing a bread-riot; for the camp was far from supplies, and had been ill victualed for several days. They asked rapidly what was the matter.

"Biribi has been killed," some soldier answered.

"Ah! and the bread not come?"

"Yes, *mon adjutant;* the bread is there, and Cigarette too."

"There is no need for me, then," muttered the adjutant of Zouaves; "the Little One will keep order."

The Little One had before now quelled a mutiny with her pistol at the ringleader's forehead, and her brave scornful words scourging the insubordinates for their dishonor to their arms, for their treason to the tricolor; and she was equal to the occasion now. She lifted her right hand:

"We will avenge him. That is of course. The Flag of France never hangs idly when there is a brave life's loss to be reckoned for; I shall know again the cur that fled. Trust to me, and now be silent. You bawl out your oath of vengeance, oh yes! But you bawled as loud a minute ago for bread. Biribi loved you better than you deserved. You deserve nothing; you are hounds ready to tear for offal to eat as to rend the foe of your dead friend. Bah!"

The roar of the voices sank somewhat; Cigarette had sprung aloft on a gun-carriage, and as the sun

shone on her face it was brilliant with the scorn that lashed them like whips.

"Sang de Dieu!" fiercely swore a Zouave. "Hounds, indeed! If it were any one but you! When one has had nothing but a snatch of raw bullock's meat, and a taste of coffee black with mud, for a week through, is one a hound because one hungers?"

"No," said the orator from her elevation, and her eyes softened wonderfully. In her heart she loved them so well, these wild barbaric warriors that she censured—"no, one is not a hound because one hungers; but one is not a soldier if one complains. Well! Biribi loved you; and I am here to do his will, to do his work. He came laden; his back was loaded heavier than the mules'. To the front, all of you, as I name you! Petit-Pot-de-Terre, there is your old mother's letter. If she knew as much as I do about you, scapegrace, she would never trouble herself whether you were dead or alive! Fagotin! here is a bundle of Paris newspapers for you; they are quite new—only nine months old! Potélé! some woman has sent you a love-scrawl and some tobacco; I suppose she knew your passions all ended in smoke! Rafle! here is a little money come for you from France; it has not been stolen, so it will have no spice for you! Racoleur! here is a *poulet** from some simpleton, with a knife as a souvenir; sharpen it on the Arbicos. Poupard, Loup-terrible, Jean Pagnote, Pince-Maille, Louis Magot, Jules Goupil—here! There are your letters, your papers, your commissions. Biribi forgot nothing. As if you deserved to be worked for or thought of, *sacripans!*"

With which reproach, Cigarette relieved herself of the certain pain that was left on her by the death of

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* Love-billet.

Biribi; she always found, that to work yourself into a passion with somebody is the very best way in the world to banish an unwelcome emotion.

The men summoned by their camp-sobriquets, which were so familiar that they had, many of them, fairly forgotten their original names, rallied around her to receive the various packets with which a Tringlo is commonly charged by friends in the towns, or relatives away in France, for the soldiers of African brigades, and which, as well as his convoy of food and his budget of news, render him so precious and so welcome an arrival at an encampment. The dead Biribi had been one of the lightest, brightest, cheeriest, and sauciest of the gay, kindly, industrious wanderers of his branch of the service; always willing to lend; always ready to help; always smoking, singing, laughing, chattering; treating his three mules as an indulgent mother her children; calling them Plick, Plack, et Plock, and thinking of Plick, Plack, et Plock far beyond himself at all times; a merry, busy, smiling, tender-hearted soul, who was always happy, trudging along the sunburnt road, and caroling in his joyous voice *chansonnettes* and *gaudrioles* to the African flocks and herds, amid the African solitudes. If there were a man they loved, it was Biribi; Biribi, whose advent in camp had always been the signal for such laughter, such abundance, such showers of newspapers, such quantities of intelligence from that France for tidings of which the hardest-featured veteran among them would ask with a pang at the heart, with a thrill in the words. And they had sworn, and would keep what they had sworn in bitter intensity, to avenge him to the uttermost point of vengeance. Yet five minutes afterward, when the provisions Plick, Plack, et Plock had brought were divided and given out, they were

shouting, eating, singing, devouring, with as eager a zest, and as hearty an enjoyment, as though Biribi were among them, and did not lie dead two leagues away, with a dozen wounds slashed on his stiffening frame.

"What heartless brutes! Are they always like that?" muttered a gentleman painter who, traveling through the interior to get military sketches, had obtained permission to take up quarters in the camp.

"If they were not like that they could not live a day," a voice answered, curtly, behind him. "Do you know what this service is, that you venture to judge them? Men who meet death in the face every five minutes they breathe cannot afford the space for sentimentalism which those who saunter at ease and in safety can do. They laugh when we are dead, perhaps, but they are true as steel to us while we live;—it is the reverse of the practice of the world!"

The tourist started, turned, and looked aghast at the man who had reproved him; it was a Chasseur d'Afrique, who, having spoken, was already some way onward, moving through the press and tumult of the camp to his own regiment's portion of it.

Cigarette, standing by to see that Plick, Plack, and Plock were properly baited on the greenest forage to be found, heard, and her eyes flashed with a deep delight.

"Dame!" she thought, "I could not have answered better myself! He is a true soldier, that." And she forgave Cecil all his sins to her with the quick, impetuous, generous pardon of her warm little Gallic heart.

Cigarette believed that she could hate very bitterly; indeed, her power of resentment she rated high among her grandest qualities. Had the little leopard been told that she could not resent to the death what offended her, she would have held herself most infamously in-

sulted. Yet hate was, in truth, foreign to her frank, vivacious nature; its deadliness never belonged to her, if its passion might; and at a trait akin to her, at a flash of sympathetic spirit in the object of her displeasure, Cigarette changed from wrath to friendship with the true instinct of her little heart of gold. A heart which, though it had been tossed about on a sea of blood, and had never been graven with so much as one tender word or one moral principle from the teachings of any creature, was still gold, despite all, no matter the bruises and the stains and the furnace-heats that had done their best to harden it into bronze, to debase it into brass.

The camp was large, and a splendid picture of color, movement, picturesque combination, and wonderful light and shadow, as the sun-glow died out and the fires were lighted; for the nights were now intensely cold, cold with the cutting, icy, withering *bise*, and clear above as an Antarctic night, though the days were still hot and dry as flame.

On the left were the Tirailleurs, the Zouaves, the Zephyrs; on the right were the Cavalry and the Artillery; in the center of all was the tent of the Chief. Everywhere, as evening fell, the red warmth of fires rose; the caldron of soup or of coffee simmered, gipsy-like, above; the men lounged around, talking, laughing, cooking, story-telling at their pleasure; after the semi-starvation of the last week, the abundance of stores that had come in with other Tringlos besides poor Biribi, caused an universal hilarity. The glitter of accouterments, the contents of open knapsacks, the skins of animals just killed for the *marmite*, the boughs of pines broken for firewood, strewed the ground. Tethered horses, stands of arms, great drums and eagle-guidons, the looming darkness of huge cannon, the

blackness, like dromedaries couched, of caissons and ambulance-wagons, the whiteness of the canvas tents, the incessant movement as the crowds of soldiery stirred, and chattered, and worked, and sang—all these, on the green level of the plain, framed in by the towering masses of the rugged rocks, made a picture of marvelous effect and beauty.

Cecil, looking at it, thought so; though the harsh and bitter misery which he knew that glittering scene enfolded, and which he had suffered so many years himself—misery of hunger, of cold, of shot-wounds, of racking bodily pains—stole from it, in his eyes, that poetry and that picturesque brilliancy which it bore to the sight of the artist and the amateur. He knew the naked terrors of war, the agony, the travail, the icy chills, the sirocco heats, the grinding routine, the pitiless chastisements of its reality; to those who do, it can no longer be a spectacle dressed in the splendid array of romance. It is a fearful tragedy and farce woven close one in another; and its sole joy is in that bloodthirst which men so lustfully share with the tiger, and yet shudder from when they have sated it.

It was this knowledge of war, in its bitter and deadly truth, which had made him give the answer that had charmed Cigarette, to the casual visitor of the encampment.

He sat now, having recovered from the effects of the day of Zaraila, within a little distance of the fire at which his men were stewing some soup in the great simmering copper bowl. They had eaten nothing for nigh a week, except some mouldy bread, with the chance of a stray cat or a shot bird to flavor it. Hunger was a common thorn in Algerian warfare, since not even the matchless *intendance* of France could regularly supply the troops across those interminable breadths

of arid land, those sun-scorched plains, swept by Arab foragers.

"Beau Victor! you took their parts well," said a voice behind him, as Cigarette vaulted over a pile of knapsacks and stood in the glow of the fire, with a little pipe in her pretty rosebud mouth and her cap set daintily on one side of her curls.

He looked up, and smiled.

"Not so well as your own clever tongue would have done. Words are not my weapons."

"No! You are as silent as the grave commonly; but when you do speak, you speak well," said the vivandière-Demosthenes, condescendingly. "I hate silence myself! Thoughts are very good grain, but if they are not whirled round, round, round, and winnowed and ground in the millstones of talk, they keep little, hard, useless kernels, that not a soul can digest."

With which metaphor Cigarette blew a cloud of smoke into the night air, looking the prettiest little *genre* picture in the ruddy firelight that ever was painted on such a background of wavering shadow and undulating flame.

"Will your allegory hold good, *petite?*" smiled Cecil, thinking but little of his answer or of his companion, of whose service to him he remained utterly ignorant. "I fancy speech is the chaff most generally, little better. So, they talk of you for the Cross? No soldier ever, of a surety, more greatly deserved it."

Her eyes gleamed with a luster like the African planets above her; her face caught all the fire, the light, the illumination of the flames flashing near her.

"I did nothing," she said, curtly. "Any man on the field would have done the same."

"That is easy to say; not so easy to prove. In all great events there may be the same strength, courage,

and desire to act greatly in those who follow as in the one that leads; but it is only in that one that there is also the daring to originate, the genius to seize aright the moment of action and of success."

Cigarette was a little hero; she was, moreover, a little desperado, but she was a child in years and a woman at heart, valiant and ruthless young soldier though she might be. She colored all over her *mignonne* face at the words of eulogy from this man whom she had told herself she hated: her eyes filled; her lips trembled.

"It was nothing," she said, softly, under her breath. "I would die twenty deaths for France."

He looked at her, and for the hour understood her aright; he saw that there was the love for her country and the power of sacrifice of a Viriathus or an Arminius in this gay-plumaged and capricious little hawk of the desert.

"You have a noble nature, Cigarette," he said, with an earnest regard at her. "My poor child, if only——" He paused. He was thinking what it was hard to say to her—if only the accidents of her life had been different, what beauty, grace, and genius might have been developed out of the untamed, untutored, inconsequent, but glorious nature of the child-warrior.

As by a fate, unconsciously his pity embittered all the delight his praise had given, and this implied regret for her stung her as the rend of the spur a young Arab colt—stung her inwardly into cruel wrath and pain; outwardly into irony, devilry, and contemptuous retort.

"Oh-hé! Child, indeed! Was I a child the other day, my good fellow, when I saved your squadron from being cut to pieces like grass with a scythe? As for nobility? Pouf! Not much of that in me. I love France—yes. A soldier always loves his country. She is so brave, too, and so fair, and so *riante*, and so gay.

Not like your Albion—if it *is* yours—who is a great *gobemouche* stuffed full of cotton, steaming with fog, clutching gold with one hand and the Bible with the other, that she may swell her money-bags, and seem a saint all the same; never laughing, never learning, always growling, always shuffling, who is like this spider —look!—a tiny body and huge hairy legs—pull her legs, the Colonies, off, and leave her little English body, all shriveled and shrunk alone, and I should like to know what size she would be then, and how she would manage to swell and to strut?"

Wherewith Cigarette tossed the spider into the air, with all the supreme disdain she could impel into that gesture. Cigarette, though she knew not her A, B, C, D, and could not have written her name to save her own life, had a certain bright intelligence of her own that caught up political tidings, and grasped at public subjects with a skill education alone will not bestow. One way and another, she had heard most of the floating opinions of the day, and stored them up in her fertile brain as a bee stores honey into its hive by much as nature-given and unconscious an instinct as the bee's own.

Cecil listened amused.

"You little Anglophobist! You have the tongue of a Voltaire."

"Voltaire?" questioned Cigarette. "Voltaire! Let me see. I know that name. He was the man who championed Calas? who had a fowl in the pot for every poor wretch that passed his house? who was taken to the Panthéon by the people in the Revolution?"

"Yes. And the man whom the wise world pretends still to call without a heart or a God!"

"Chut! He fed the poor and freed the wronged. Better than pattering Paters, that!" said Cigarette, who thought a midnight mass at Notre Dame or a Salutation

at the Madeleine a pretty *coup de théâtre* enough, but who had for all churches and creeds a serene contempt and a fierce disdain. "Go to the grandams and the children!" she would say, with a shrug of her shoulders, to a priest, whenever one in Algiers or Paris attempted to reclaim her; and a son of the Order of Jesus, famed for persuasiveness and eloquence, had been fairly beaten once when, in the ardor of an African missionary, he had sought to argue with the little Bohemian of the Tricolor, and had had his logic rent in twain, and his rhetoric scattered like dust, under the merciless home-thrusts and the sarcastic artillery of Cigarette's replies and inquiries.

"Holà!" she cried, leaving Voltaire for what took her fancy. "We talk of Albion—there is one of her sons. I detest your country, but, *ma foi!* I must confess she breeds uncommonly handsome men."

She was a dilettante in handsome men; she nodded her head now to where, some yards off, at another of the camp-fires, stood, with some officers of the regiment, one of the tourists; a very tall, very fair man, with a gallant bearing, and a tawny beard that glittered to gold in the light of the flames.

Cecil's glance followed Cigarette's. With a great cry he sprang to his feet and stood entranced, gazing at the stranger. She saw the startled amaze, the longing love, the agony of recognition, in his eyes; she saw the impulse in him to spring forward, and the shuddering effort with which the impulse was controlled. He turned to her almost fiercely:

"He must not see me! Keep him away—away, for God's sake!"

He could not leave his men; he was fettered there where his squadron was camped. He went as far as he could from the flame-light into the shadow, and thrust

himself among the tethered horses. Cigarette asked nothing; comprehended at a glance with all the tact of her nation; and sauntered forward to meet the officers of the regiment as they came up to the picket-fire with the yellow-haired English stranger. She knew how charming a picture there, with her hands lightly resting on her hips, and her bright face danced on by the ruddy fire-glow, she made: she knew she could hold thus the attention of a whole brigade. The eyes of the stranger lighted on her, and his voice laughed in mellow music to his companions and *ciceroni*.

"Your intendance is perfect; your ambulance is perfect; your camp-cookery is perfect, messieurs; and here you have even perfect beauty too! Truly, campaigning must be pleasant work in Algeria!"

Then he turned to her with compliments frank and gay, and full of a débonnair grace that made her doubt he could be of Albion.

Retort was always ready to her; and she kept the circle of officers in full laughter round the vidette fire with a shower of repartee that would have made her fortune on the stage of the Châtelet or Folies Marigny. And every now and then her glance wandered to the shadow where the horses were tethered.

Bah! why was she always doing him service? She could not have told. "*Parcequ' j' suit bien bête*," said Cigarette mentally, with a certain fiery contempt for herself.

Still she went on—and did it.

It was a fantastic picture by the bright scarlet light of the camp-fire, with the Little One in her full glory of mirth and mischief, and her circle of officers laughing on her with admiring eyes; nearest her the towering height of the English stranger with the gleam of the flame in the waves of his leonine beard.

From the darkness, where the scores of gray horses were tethered, Cecil's eyes were riveted on it. There were none near to see him; had there been, they would have seen an agony in his eyes that no physical misery, no torture of the battle-field, had brought there. His face was bloodless, and his gaze strained through the gleam on to the fire-lit group with a passionate intensity of yearning;—he was well used to pain, well used to self-control, well used to self-restraint, but for the first time in his exile the bitterness of a struggle almost vanquished him. All the old love of his youth went out to this man, so near beside him, yet so hopelessly severed from him: looking on the face of his friend, a violence of longing shook him: "O God, if I were dead!" he thought, "they might know then——"

He would have died gladly to have had that familiar hand once more touch his; those familiar eyes once more look on him with the generous tender trust of old.

His brain reeled, his thoughts grew blind, as he stood there among his horses with the stir and tumult of the bivouac about him. There was nothing simpler, nothing less strange, than that an English soldier should visit the Franco-Arab camp; but to him it seemed like the resurrection of the dead.

Whether it was a brief moment, or an hour through, that the circle stood about the great black caldron that was swinging above the flames, he could not have told: to him it was an eternity. The echo of the mellow ringing tones that he knew so well came to him from the distance, till his heart seemed breaking with but one forbidden longing, to look once more in those brave eyes that made every coward and liar quail, and say only, "I was guiltless."

It is bitter to know those whom we love dead; but it

is more bitter to be as dead to those who, once having loved us, have sunk our memory deep beneath oblivion that is not the oblivion of the grave.

Awhile, and the group broke up and was scattered, the English traveler throwing gold pieces by the score among the waiting troopers. "*A bientôt!*" they called to Cigarette, who nodded farewell to them with a cigar in her mouth, and busied herself pouring some brandy into the old copper caldron in which some black coffee and muddy water, three parts sand, was boiling. A few moments later, and they were out of sight among the confusion, the crowds, and the flickering shadows of the camp. When they were quite gone, she came softly to him; she could not see him well in the gloom, but she touched his hand.

"Dieu! how cold you are! He is gone."

He could not answer her to thank her, but he crushed in his the little warm brown palm. She felt a shiver shake his limbs.

"Is he your enemy?" she asked.

"No."

"What then?"

"The man I love best on earth."

"Ah!" She had felt a surprise she had not spoken that he should flee thus from any foe. "He thinks you dead, then?"

"Yes."

"And must always think so?"

"Yes." He held her hand still, and his own wrung it hard—the grasp of comrade to comrade, not of man to woman. "Child, you are bold, generous, pitiful; for God's sake, get me sent out of this camp to-night. I am powerless."

There was that in the accent which struck his listener to the heart. He was powerless, fettered hand and foot

as though he were a prisoner; a night's absence, and he would be shot as a deserter. He had grown accustomed to this rendering up of all his life to the rules of others; but now and then the galled spirit chafed, the netted stag strained at the bonds.

"I will try," said Cigarette, simply, without anything of her audacity or of her vanity in the answer. "Go you to the fire; you are cold."

"Are you sure he will not return?"

"Not he. They are gone to eat and drink; I go with them. What is it you fear?"

"My own weakness."

She was silent. She could just watch his features by the dim light, and she saw his mouth quiver under the fullness of his beard. He felt that if he looked again on the face of the man he loved he might be broken into self-pity, and unloose his silence, and shatter all the work of so many years. He had been strong where men of harder fiber and less ductile temper might have been feeble; but he never thought that he had been so; he only thought that he had acted on impulse, and had remained true to his act through the mere instinct of honor—an instinct inborn in his blood and his order—an instinct natural and unconscious with him as the instinct by which he drew his breath.

"You are a fine soldier," said Cigarette, musingly; "such men are not weak."

"Why? We are only strong as tigers are strong—just the strength of the talon and fang. I do not know. I was weak as water once; I may be again, if —if——"

He scarcely knew that he was speaking aloud; he had forgotten her! His whole heart seemed burnt as with fire by the memory of that one face so familiar, so well loved, yet from which he must shrink as though

some cowardly sin were between them. The wretchedness on him seemed more than he could bear; to know that this man was so near that the sound of his voice raised could summon him, yet that he must remain as dead to him—remain as one dead after a craven and treacherous guilt.

He turned suddenly, almost violently, upon Cigarette:

"You have surprised my folly from me; you know my secret so far; but you are too brave to betray me, you are too generous to tell of this? I can trust you to be silent?"

Her face flushed scarlet with astonished anger; her little childlike form grew instinct with haughty and fiery dignity.

"Monsieur, that question from one soldier of France to another is insult. We are not dastards!"

There was a certain grave reproach that mingled with the indignant scorn of the answer, and showed that her own heart was wounded by the doubt, as well as her military pride by the aspersion. Even amid the conflict of pain at war in him he felt that, and hastened to soothe it.

"Forgive me, my child; I should not have wronged you with the question. It is needless, I know. Men can trust you to the death, they say."

"To the death—yes."

The answer was thoughtful, dreamy, almost sad, for Cigarette. His thoughts were too far from her in their tumult of awakened memories to note the tone as he went rapidly on:

"You have ingenuity, compassion, tact; you have power here, too, in your way; for the love of Heaven get me sent out on some duty before dawn! There is Biribi's murder to be avenged—would they give the errand to me?"

She thought a moment.

"We will see," she said, curtly. "I think I can do it. But go back, or you will be missed. I will come to you soon."

She left him then, rapidly, drawing her hand quickly out of the clasp of his.

"*Que je suis bête! Que je suis bête!*" said Cigarette to herself; for she felt her heart aching to its core for the sorrow of this man who was nothing to her. He did not know what she had done for him in his suffering and delirium; he did not know how she had watched him all that night through, when she was weary, and bruised, and thirsting for sleep; he did not know; he held her hand as one comrade another's, and never looked to see if her eyes were blue or were black, were laughing or tear-laden. And yet she felt pain in his pain; she was always giving her life to his service. "*Que je suis bête! Que je suis bête!*" she murmured again. Many beside the little Friend of the Flag beat back as folly the noblest and purest thing in them.

Cecil mechanically returned to the fire at which the men of his *tribu* were cooking their welcome supper, and sat down near them, rejecting, with a gesture, the most savory portion which, with their customary love and care for him, they were careful to select and bring to him. There had never been a time when they had found him fail to prefer them to himself, or fail to do them kindly service, if of such he had a chance; and they returned it with all that rough and silent attachment that can be so strong and so stanch in lives that may be black with crime or red with slaughter.

He sat like a man in a dream, while the loosened tongues of the men ran noisily on a hundred themes as they chaffed each other, exchanged a fire of bivouac jokes more racy than decorous, and gave themselves to

the enjoyment of their rude meal, that had to them that savor which long hunger alone can give. Their voices came dull on his ear; the ruddy warmth of the fire was obscured to his sight; the din, the laughter, the stir all over the great camp, at the hour of dinner were lost on him. He was insensible to everything except the innumerable memories that thronged upon him, and the aching longing that filled his heart with the sight of the friend of his youth.

"He said once that he would take my hand before all the world always, come what would," he thought. "Would he take it now, I wonder? Yes; *he* never believed against me."

And, as he thought, the same anguish of desire that had before smitten him to stand once more guiltless in the presence of men, and once more bear, untarnished, the name of his race and the honor of his fathers, shook him now as strong winds shake a tree that yet is fast rooted at its base, though it sway awhile beneath the storm.

"How weak I am!" he thought, bitterly. "What does it matter? Life is so short, one is a coward indeed to fret over it. I cannot undo what I did. I cannot, if I would. To betray him *now!* God! not for a kingdom, if I had the chance! Besides, she may live still; and, even were she dead, to tarnish her name to clear my own would be a scoundrel's baseness—baseness that would fail as it merited; for who could be brought to believe me now?"

The thoughts unformed drifted through his mind, half dulled, half sharpened by the deadly pain, and the rush of old brotherly love that had arisen in him as he had seen the face of his friend beside the watch-fire of the French bivouac. It was hard; it was cruelly hard; he had, after a long and severe conflict, brought him-

self into contentment with his lot, and taught himself oblivion of the past, and interest in the present, by active duties and firm resolve; he had vanquished all the habits, controlled most of the weakness, and banished nearly all the frailties and indulgences of his temperament in the long ordeal of African warfare. It was cruelly hard that now when he had obtained serenity, and more than half attained forgetfulness, these two—her face and his—must come before him, one to recall the past, the other to embitter the future!

As he sat with his head bent down and his forehead leaning on his arm, while the hard biscuit that served for a plate stood unnoticed beside him, with the food that the soldiers had placed on it, he did not hear Cigarette's step till she touched him on the arm. Then he looked up; her eyes were looking on him with a tender, earnest pity.

"Hark! I have done it," she said gently. "But it will be an errand very close to death, that you must go on——"

He raised himself erect, eagerly.

"No matter that! Ah, mademoiselle, how I thank you!"

"Chut! I am no Paris demoiselle!" said Cigarette, with a dash of her old acrimony. "Ceremony in a camp—pouf! You must have been a court chamberlain once, weren't you? Well, I have done it. Your officers were talking yonder of a delicate business; they were uncertain who best to employ. I put in my speech—it was dead against military etiquette, but I did it—I said to M. le Général: 'You want the best rider, the most silent tongue, and the surest steel in the squadrons? Take Bel-à-faire-peur, then.' 'Who is that?' asked the general; he would have sent out of camp anybody but Cigarette for the interruption. 'Mon

Général,' said I, 'the Arabs asked that, too, the other day at Zaraila.' 'What!' he cried, 'the man Victor—who held the ground with his Chasseurs! I know—a fine soldier. M. le Colonel, shall we send him?' The Black Hawk had scowled thunder on you; he hates you more still since that affair of Zaraila, specially, because the general has reported your conduct with such praise that they cannot help but promote you. Well, he had looked thunder, but now he laughed. 'Yes, mon Général,' he answered him, 'take him, if you like. It is fifty to one whoever goes on that business will not come back alive, and you will rid me of the most insolent fine gentleman in my squadrons.' The general hardly heard him; he was deep in thought; but he asked a good deal about you from the Hawk, and Châteauroy spoke for your fitness for the errand they are going to send you on, very truthfully, for a wonder. I don't know why; but he wants you to be sent, I think; most likely that you may be cut to pieces. And so they will send for you in a minute. I have done it as you wished, '*le diable prends le fruit.*' "

There was something of her old brusquerie and recklessness in the closing sentences; but it had not her customary débonnair lightness. She knew too well that the chances were as a hundred to one that he would never return alive from this service on which he had entreated to be dispatched. Cecil grasped both her hands in his with warm gratitude, that was still, like the touch of his hands, the gratitude of comrade to comrade, not of man to woman.

"God bless you, Cigarette! You are a true friend, my child. You have done me immeasurable benefits——"

"Oh-hé. I am a true friend," said the Little One, something pettishly. She would have preferred another

epithet. "If a man wants to get shot as a very great favor, I always let him pleasure himself. Give a man his own way, if you wish to be kind to him. You are children, all of you, nothing but children, and if the toy that pleases you best is death, why—you must have it. Nothing else would content you. I know you. You always want what flies from you, and are tired of what lies to your hand. That is always a man."

"And a woman, too, is it not?"

Cigarette shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I dare say. We love what is new—what is strange. We are humming-tops; we will only spin when we are fresh wound up with a string to our liking."

"Make an exception of yourself, my child. You are always ready to do a good action, and never tire of that. From my heart I thank you. I wish to Heaven I could prove it better."

She drew her hands away from him.

"A great thing I have done, certainly! Got you permission to go and throw a cartel at old King Death; that is all! There! Loup-à-griffes-de-fer is coming to you. That is your summons."

The orderly so nicknamed approached, and brought the bidding of the general in command of the Cavalry for Cecil to render himself at once to his presence. These things brook no second's delay in obedience; he went with a quick adieu to Cigarette, and the little Friend of the Flag was left in his vacant place beside the fire.

And there was a pang at her heart.

"Ten to one he goes to his death," she thought. But Cigarette, *volage* little mischief though she was, could reach very high in one thing; she could reach a love that was unselfish, and one that was heroic.

A few moments, and Cecil returned.

"Rake," he said rapidly, in the French he habitually used, "saddle my horse and your own. I am allowed to choose one of you to accompany me."

Rake, in paradise, and the envied of every man in the squadrons, turned to his work—with him a task of scarce more than a second; and Cecil approached his little Friend of the Flag.

"My child, I cannot attempt to thank you. But for you, I should have been tempted to send my lance through my own heart."

"Keep its lunge for the Arbicos, *mon ami*," said Cigarette brusquely—the more brusquely because that new and bitter pang was on her. "As for me, I want no thanks."

"No; you are too generous. But not the less do I wish I could render them more worthily than by words. If I live, I will try; if not, keep this in my memory. It is the only thing I have."

He put into her hand the ring she had seen in the little *bonbonnière;* a ring of his mother's that he had saved when he had parted with all else, and that he had put off his hand and into the box of Petite Reine's gift the day he had entered the Algerian army.

Cigarette flushed scarlet with passions he could not understand, and she could not have disentangled.

"The ring of your mistress! Not for me, if I know it! Do you think I want to be paid?"

"The ring was my mother's," he answered her simply. "And I offer it only *en souvenir*."

She lost all her hot color, and all her fiery wrath; his grave and gentle courtesy always strangely stilled and rebuked her; but she raised the ring off the ground where she had flung it, and placed it back in his hand.

"If so, still less should you part with it. Keep it;

it will bring you happiness one day. As for me, I have done nothing, pardieu!"

"You have done what I value the more for that noble disclaimer. May I thank you thus, Little One?"

He stooped and kissed her; a kiss that the lips of a man will always give to the bright youthful lips of a woman, but a kiss, as she knew well, without passion, even without tenderness in it.

With a sudden impetuous movement, with a shyness and a refusal that had never been in her before, she wrested herself from him, her face burning, her heart panting, and plunged away from him into the depth of the shadow; and he never sought to follow her, but threw himself into saddle as his gray was brought up: another instant, and, armed to the teeth, he rode out of the camp into the darkness of the silent, melancholy, lonely Arab night.

CHAPTER XXX.

SEUL AU MONDE.

THE errand on which he went was one, as he was well aware, from which it were a thousand chances to one that he ever issued alive.

It was to reach a distant branch of the Army of Occupation with dispatches for the chief in command there, and to do this he had to pass through a fiercely hostile region, occupied by Arabs with whom no sort of peace had ever been made, the most savage as well as the most predatory of the wandering tribes. His knowledge of their tongue, and his friendship with some men of their nation, would avail him nothing

here; for their fury against the Franks was intense, and it was said that all prisoners who had fallen into their hands had been put to death with merciless barbarities. This might be true or untrue; wild tales were common among Algerian campaigners; whichever it were, he thought little of it as he rode out on to the lonely plains. Every kind of hazardous adventure and every variety of peril had been familiar with him in this African life; and now there were thoughts and memories on him which deadened every recollection of merely physical risk.

"We must ride as hard and as fast as we can, and *as silently*," were the only words he exchanged with Rake, as he loosened his gray to a hand-gallop.

"All right, sir," answered the trooper, whose warm blood was dancing, and whose blue eyes were alive like fire with delight. That he had been absent on a far-away foraging raid on the day of Zaraila had been nothing short of agony to Rake, and the choice made of him for this duty was to him a gift of paradise. He loved fighting for fighting's sake; and to be beside Cecil was the greatest happiness life held for him.

They had two hundred miles to traverse, and had received only the command he had passed on Rake, to ride "hard, fast, and silently." To the hero of Zaraila the general had felt too much soldierly sympathy to add the superfluous injunction to do his uttermost to carry safely and successfully to their destination the papers that were placed in his saber-tasche. They knew well that the errand would be done, or the Chasseur's *main de femme, mais main de fer*, would be stiffened and nerveless in death.

It was just nightfall; the after-glow had faded only a few moments before. Giving their horses, which they were to change once, ten hours for the distance

and two for bait and for rest, he reckoned that they would reach the camp before the noon of the coming day, as the beasts, fresh and fast in the camp, flew like greyhounds beneath them.

Another night ride that they had ridden together came to the minds of both; but they spoke not a word as they swept on, their sabers shaken loose in their sheaths, their lances well gripped, and the pistols with which they had been supplied sprung in their belts ready for instant action if a call should come for it. Every rood of the way was as full of unseen danger as if laid over mines. They might pass in safety; they might any moment be cut down by ten score against two. From every hanging scarp of rugged rock a storm of musket-balls might pour; from every screen of wild-fig foliage a shower of lances might whistle through the air; from every darkling grove of fir-trees an Arab band might spring and swoop on them;—but the knowledge scarcely recurred to the one save to make him shake his sword more at loose for quick disengagement, and only made the sunny blue eyes of the other sparkle with a vivid and longing zest.

The night grew very chill as it wore on; the north wind rose, rushing against them with a force and icy touch that seemed to freeze their bones to the marrow after the heat of the day and the sun that had scorched them so long. There was no regular road; they went across the country, their way sometimes leading over level land, over which they swept like lightning, great plains succeeding one another with wearisome monotony; sometimes, on the contrary, lying through ravines, and defiles, and gloomy woods, and broken hilly spaces, where rent bare rocks were thrown on one another in gigantic confusion, and the fantastic shapes of the wild fig and the dwarf palm gathered a hideous

grotesqueness in the darkness. For there was no moon, and the stars were often hidden by the storm-rack of leaden clouds that drifted over the sky; and the only sound they heard was the cry of the jackal, or the shriek of the night bird, and now and then the sound of shallow water-courses, where the parched beds of hidden brooks had been filled by the autumnal rain.

The first five and twenty miles passed without interruption, and the horses laid well and warmly to their work. They halted to rest and bait the beasts in a rocky hollow, sheltered from the blasts of the *bise*, and green with short sweet grass, sprung up afresh after the summer drought.

"Do you ever think of *him*, sir?" said Rake, softly, with a lingering love in his voice, as he stroked the grays and tethered them.

"Of whom?"

"Of the King, sir. If he's alive, he's gettin' a rare old horse now."

"Think of him! I wish I did not, Rake."

"Wouldn't you like to see him agen, sir?"

"What folly to ask! You know——"

"Yes, sir, I know," said Rake, slowly. "And I know—leastways I picked it out of a old paper—that your elder brother died, sir, like the old lord, and Mr. Berk.'s got the title."

Rake had longed and pined for an opportunity to dare say this thing which he had learned, and which he could not tell whether or no Cecil knew likewise. His eyes looked with straining eagerness through the gloom into his master's; he was uncertain how his words would be taken. To his bitter disappointment, Cecil's face showed no change, no wonder.

"I have heard that," he said, calmly—as calmly as

though the news had no bearing on his fortunes, but was some stranger's history.

"Well, sir, but he *ain't* the lord?" pleaded Rake, passionately. "He won't never be while you're living, sir!"

"Oh yes, he is! I am dead, you know."

"But he *won't,* sir!" reiterated Rake. "You're Lord Royallieu if ever there was a Lord Royallieu, and if ever there will be one."

"You mistake. An outlaw has no civil rights, and can claim none."

The man looked very wistfully at him; all these years through he had never learned why his master was thus "dead" in Africa, and he had too loyal a love and faith ever to ask, or ever to doubt but that Cecil was the wronged and not the wrong-doer.

"You ain't a outlaw, sir," he muttered. "You could take the title if you would."

"Oh no! I left England under a criminal charge; I should have to disprove that before I could inherit."

Rake crushed bitter oaths into muttered words as he heard. "You could disprove it, sir, of course, right and away, if you chose."

"No; or I should not have come here. Let us leave the subject. It was settled long ago. My brother is Lord Royallieu. I would not disturb him, if I had the power, and I have not it. Look, the horses are taking well to their feed."

Rake asked him no more: he had never had a harsh word from Cecil in their lives; but he knew him too well for all that to venture to press on him a question thus firmly put aside. But his heart ached sorely for his master; he would so gladly have seen "the king among his own again," and would have striven for the restoration as strenuously as ever a Cavalier strove for

the White Rose; and he sat in silence, perplexed and ill satisfied, under the shelter of the rock, with the great, dim, desolate African landscape stretching before him, with here and there a gleam of light upon it when the wind swept the clouds apart. His volatile speech was chilled, and his buoyant spirits were checked. That Cecil was justly outlawed he would have thought it the foulest treason to believe for one instant; yet he felt that he might as soon seek to wrench up the great stones above him from their base as seek to change the resolution of this man, whom he had once known pliant as a reed and careless as a child.

They were before long in saddle again and off, the country growing wilder at each stride the horses took.

"It is all alive with Arabs for the next ten leagues," said Cecil, as he settled himself in his saddle. "They have come northward and been sweeping the country like a locust-swarm, and we shall blunder on some of them sooner or later. If they cut me down, don't wait, but slash my saber-tasche loose and ride off with it."

"All right, sir," said Rake, obediently; but he thought to himself, "Leave you alone with them demons? Damn me if I will."

And away they went once more, in speed and in silence, the darkness of full night closing in on them, the skies being black with the heavy drift of rising storm-clouds.

Meantime Cigarette was feasting with the officers of his regiment. The dinner was the best that the camp-scullions could furnish in honor of the two or three illustrious tourists who were on a visit to the head-quarters of the Algerian Army; and the Little One, the heroine of Zaraila, and the toast of every mess throughout Algeria, was as indispensable as the cham-

pagnes. Not that she was altogether herself to-night; she was feverish, she was bitter, she was full of stinging ironies; but that delicious gayety, like a kitten's play, was gone from her, and its place, for the first time in her life, was supplied by unreal and hectic excitation. In truth, while she laughed, and coquetted, and fenced with the bright two-edged blade of her wit, and tossed down the wines into her little throat like a trooper, she was thinking nothing at all of what was around her, and very little of what she said or she did. She was thinking of the starless night out yonder, of the bleak arid country, of the great, dim, measureless plains; of one who was passing through them all, and one who might never return.

It was the first time that the absent had ever troubled her present; it was the first time that ever this foolish, senseless, haunting, unconquerable fear for another had approached her: fear!—she had never known it for herself, why should she feel it now for him?—a man whose lips had touched her own as lightly, as indifferently, as they might have touched the leaves of a rose or the curls of a dog!

She felt her face burn with the flush of a keen, unbearable, passionate shame. Men by the score had wooed her love, to be flouted with the insouciant mischief of her coquetry, and forgotten to-morrow if they were shot to-day; and now he—he whose careless, calm caress would make her heart vibrate and her limbs tremble with an emotion she had never known—he valued her love so little that he never even knew that he had roused it! To the proud young warrior of France a greater degradation, a deadlier humiliation, than this could not have come to her.

Yet she was true as steel to him; true with the strong and loyal fealty that is inborn with such natures as

hers. To have betrayed what he had trusted to her, because she was neglected and wounded by him, would have been a feminine baseness of which the soldier-like soul of Cigarette would have been totally incapable. Her revenge might be fierce, and rapid, and sure, like the revenge of a soldier; but it could never be stealing and traitorous, and never like the revenge of a woman.

Not a word escaped her that could have given a clew to the secret with which he had involuntarily weighted her; she only studied with interest and keenness the face and the words of this man whom he had loved, and from whom he had fled as criminals flee from their accusers.

"What is your name?" she asked him, curtly, in one of the pauses of the amorous and witty nonsense that circulated in the tent in which the officers of Chasseurs were entertaining him.

"Well—some call me Seraph."

"Ah! you have *petits noms* then in Albion? I should have thought she was too somber and too stiff for them. Besides?"

"Lyonnesse."

"What a droll name! What are you?"

"A soldier."

"Good! What grade?"

"A Colonel of Guards."

Cigarette gave a little whistle to herself; she remembered that a Marshal of France had once said of a certain Chasseur, "He has the seat of the English Guards."

"My pretty catechist, M. le Duc does not tell you his title," cried one of the officers.

Cigarette interrupted him with a toss of her head.

"Ouf! Titles are nothing to me. I am a child of

the People. So you are a Duke, are you, M. le Seraph? Well, that is not much, to my thinking. Bah! there is Fialin made a Duke in Paris, and there are aristocrats here wearing privates' uniforms, and littering down their own horses. Bah! Have you that sort of thing in Albion?"

"Attorneys throned on high, and gentlemen glad to sweep crossings? Oh yes!" laughed her interlocutor. "But you speak of aristocrats in your ranks—that reminds me. Have you not in this corps a soldier called Louis Victor?"

He had turned as he spoke to one of the officers who answered him in the affirmative; while Cigarette listened with all her curiosity and all her interest, that needed a deeper name, heightened and tight-strung.

"A fine fellow," continued the *Chef d'Escadron* to whom he had appealed. "He behaved magnificently the other day at Zaraila: he must be distinguished for it. He is just sent on a perilous errand, but though so quiet he is a *crocmitaine*, and woe to the Arabs who slay him! Are you acquainted with him?"

"Not in the least. But I wished to hear all I could of him. I have been told he seems above his present position. Is it so?"

"Likely enough, monsieur, he seems a gentleman. But then we have many gentlemen in the ranks, and we can make no difference for that. Cigarette can tell you more of him; she used to complain that he bowed like a Court chamberlain."

"Oh-hè—I did!" cried Cigarette, stung into instant irony because pained and irritated by being appealed to on the subject. "And, of course, when so many of his officers have the manners of Pyrenéan bears, it is a little awkward for him to bring us the manners of a Palace!"

Which effectually chastised the Chef d'Escadron, who was one of those who had a *ton de garnison* of the roughest, and piqued himself on his powers of fence much more than on his habits of delicacy.

"Has this Victor any history?" asked the English Duke.

"He has written one with his sword; a fine one," said Cigarette, curtly. "We are not given here to care much about any other."

"Quite right; I asked because a friend of mine who had seen his carvings wished to serve him if it were possible; and——"

"Ho! That is Miladi, I suppose?" Cigarette's eyes flashed fire instantly, in wrath and suspicion. "What did she tell you about him, *la belle dédaigneuse?*"

"I am ignorant of whom you speak?" he answered, with something of surprise and annoyance.

"Are you?" said Cigarette, in derision. "I doubt that. Of whom should I speak but of *her?* Bah! She insulted him, she offered him gold, she sent my men the spoils of her table, as if they were paupers, and he thinks it all divine because it is done by Madame la Princesse Corona d'Amagüe! Faugh! when he was delirious, the other night, he could babble of nothing but of her—of her—of her!"

The jealous, fiery impatience in her vanquished every other thought; she was a child in much, she was untutored in all; she had no thought that by her scornful vituperation of "Miladi" she could either harm Cecil or betray herself. But she was amazed to see the English guest change color with a haughty anger that he strove to subdue as he half rose and answered her with an accent in his voice that reminded her—she knew not why—of Bel-à-faire-peur and of Marquise.

"Madame la Princesse Corona d'Amagüe is my sister; why do you venture to couple the name of this Chasseur with hers?"

Cigarette sprang to her feet, vivacious, imperious, reckless, dared to anything by the mere fact of being publicly arraigned.

"Pardieu! Is it insult to couple the silver pheasant with the Eagles of France?—a pretty idea, truly! So she is your sister, is she? Miladi? Well, then, tell her from me to think twice before she outrages a soldier with 'patronage;' and tell her, too, that had I been he I would have ground my ivory toys into powder before I would have let them become the playthings of a *grande dame* who tendered me gold for them!"

The Englishman looked at her with astonishment that was mingled with a vivid sense of intense annoyance and irritated pride, that the name he cherished closest should be thus brought in, at a camp dinner, on the lips of a vivandière and in connection with a trooper of Chasseurs.

"I do not understand your indignation, mademoiselle," he said, with an impatient stroke to his beard. "There is no occasion for it. Madame Corona d'Amagüe, my sister," he continued, to the officers present, "became accidentally acquainted with the skill at sculpture of this Corporal of yours; he appeared to her a man of much refinement and good breeding. She chanced to name him to me, and feeling some pity——"

"M. le Duc!" cried the ringing voice of Cigarette, loud and startling as a bugle-note, while she stood like a little lioness, flushed with the draughts of champagne and with the warmth of wrath at once jealous and generous, "keep your compassion until it is asked of you. No soldier of France needs it; that I promise you. I

know this man that you talk of 'pitying.' Well, I saw him at Zaraila three weeks ago; he had drawn up his men to die with them rather than surrender and yield up the guidon; I dragged him half dead, when the field was won, from under his horse, and his first conscious act was to give the drink that I brought him to a wretch who had thieved from him. Our life here is hell upon earth to such as he, yet none ever heard a lament wrung out of him; he is gone to the chances of death to-night as most men go to their mistresses' kisses; he is a soldier Napoleon would have honored. Such an one is not to have the patronage of a Miladi Corona, nor the pity of a stranger of England. Let the first respect him; let the last imitate him!"

And Cigarette, having pronounced her defense and her eulogy with the vibrating eloquence of some orator from a tribune, threw her champagne goblet down with a crash, and, breaking through the arms outstretched to detain her, forced her way out despite them, and left her hosts alone in their lighted tent.

"*C'est Cigarette!*" said the Chef d'Escadron, with a shrug of his shoulders, as of one who explained, by that sentence, a whole world of irreclaimable eccentricities.

"A strange little Amazon!" said their guest. "Is she in love with this Victor, that I have offended her so much with his name?"

The Major shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know that, monsieur," answered one. "She will defend a man in his absence, and rate him to his face most soundly. Cigarette whirls about like a little paper windmill, just as the breeze blows; but, as the windmill never leaves its stick, so she is always constant to the Tri-color."

Their guest said little more on the subject; in his

own thoughts he was bitterly resentful that, by the mention of this Chasseur's fortunes, he should have brought in the name he loved so well—the purest, fairest, haughtiest name in Europe—into a discussion with a vivandière at a camp dinner.

Châteauroy, throughout, had said nothing; he had listened in silence, the darkness lowering still more heavily upon his swarthy features; only now he opened his lips for a few brief words:

"Mon cher Duc, tell Madame not to waste the rare balm of her pity. The fellow you inquire for was an outcast and an outlaw when he came to us. He fights well—it is often a blackguard's virtue!"

His guest nodded, and changed the subject; his impatience and aversion at the introduction of his sister's name into the discussion made him drop the theme unpursued, and let it die out forgotten.

Venetia Corona associated with an Algerian trooper! If Cigarette had been of his own sex, he could have dashed the white teeth down her throat for having spoken of the two in one breath.

And as, later on, he stretched his gallant limbs out on his narrow camp paillasse, tired with a long day in saddle under the hot African sun, the Seraph fell asleep with his right arm under his handsome golden head, and thought no more of this unknown French trooper.

But Cigarette remained wakeful.

She lay curled up in the straw against her pet horse, Etoile Filante, with her head on the beast's glossy flank and her hand among his mane. She often slept thus in camp, and the horse would lie still and cramped for hours rather than awaken her, or, if he rose, would take the most watchful heed to leave unharmed the slender limbs, the flushed cheeks, the frank fair brow

of the sleeper beneath him, that one stroke of his hoof could have stamped out into a bruised and shapeless mass.

To-night Etoile Filante slept, and his mistress was awake—wide awake, with her eyes looking out into the darkness beyond, with a passionate mist of unshed tears in them, and her mouth quivering with pain and with wrath. The vehement excitation had not died away in her, but there had come with it a dull, spiritless, aching depression. It had roused her to fury to hear the reference to her rival spoken—of that aristocrat whose name had been on Cecil's lips when he had been delirious. She had kept his secret loyally, she had defended him vehemently; there was something that touched her to the core in the thought of the love with which he had recognized this friend who, in ignorance, spoke of him as of some unknown French soldier. She could not tell what the history was, but she could divine nearly enough to feel its pathos and its pain. She had known, in her short life, more of men and of their passions and of their fortunes than many lives of half a century in length can ever do; she could guess, nearly enough to be wounded with its sorrow, the past which had exiled the man who had kept by him his lost mother's ring as the sole relic of years to which he was dead as utterly as though he were lying in his coffin. No matter what the precise reason was—women, or debt, or accident, or ruin—these two, who had been familiar comrades, were now as strangers to each other; the one slumbered in ignorance near her, the other had gone out to the close peril of death, lest the eyes of his friend should recognize his face and read his secret. It troubled her, it weighed on her, it smote her with a pang. It might be that now, even now—this very moment, while her gaze watched the dusky shadows of

the night chase one another along the dreary plains—a shot might have struck down this life that had been stripped of name and fame and country; even now all might be over!

And Cigarette felt a cold sickly shudder seize her that never before, at death or danger, had chilled the warm swift current of her bright French blood. In bitter scorn at herself, she muttered hot oaths between her pretty teeth.

Mère de Dieu! he had touched her lips as carelessly as her own kiss would have touched the rose-hued waxen petals of a cluster of oleander-blossoms; and she cared for him still!

While the Seraph slept dreamlessly, with the tents of the French camp around him, and the sleepless eyes of Cigarette watched afar off the dim distant forms of the videttes as they circled slowly round at their outpost duty, eight leagues off, through a vast desert of shadow and silence the two horsemen swept swiftly on. Not a word had passed between them; they rode close together in unbroken stillness; they were scarcely visible to each other, for there was no moon, and storm-clouds obscured the skies. Now and then their horses' hoofs struck fire from a flint-stone, and the flash sparkled through the darkness; often not even the sound of their gallop was audible on the gray, dry, loose soil.

Every rood of the road was sown thick with peril; no frowning ledge of rock, with pine-roots in its clefts, but might serve as the barricade behind which some foe lurked; no knot of cypress-shrubs, black even on that black sheet of shadow, but might be pierced with the steel tubes of leveled waiting muskets.

Pillaging, burning, devastating wherever they could, in what was to them a holy war of resistance to the infidel and the invader, the predatory tribes had broken

out into a revolt which the rout of Zaraila, heavy blow though it had been to them, had by no means ended. They were still in arms, infesting the country everywhere southward, defying regular pursuit, impervious to regular attacks, carrying on the harassing guerrilla warfare at which they were such adepts, and causing thus to their Frankish foe more irritation and more loss than decisive engagements would have produced. They feared nothing, had nothing to lose, and could subsist almost upon nothing. They might be driven into the desert, they might even be exterminated after long pursuit; but they would never be vanquished. And they were scattered now far and wide over the country, every cave might shelter, every ravine might inclose them; they appeared here, they appeared there; they swooped down on a convoy, they carried sword and flame into a settlement, they darted like a flight of hawks upon a foraging-party, they picked off any vidette as he wheeled his horse round in the moonlight; and every yard of the sixty miles which the two gray chargers of the Chasseurs d'Afrique must cover ere their service was done was as rife with death as though its course lay over the volcanic line of an earthquake or a hollow mined and sprung.

They had reached the center of the plain when the sound they had long looked for rang on their ears, piercing the heavy breathless stillness of the night. It was the Allah-il-Allah of their foes, the war-cry of the Moslem. Out of the gloom—whether from long pursuit or some near hiding-place they could not tell—there broke suddenly upon them the fury of an Arab onslaught. In the darkness all they could see were the flash of steel, the flame of fierce eyes against their own, the white steam of smoking horses, the spray of froth flung off the snorting nostrils, the rapid glitter of the

curved flissas—whether two, or twenty, or twice a hundred were upon them they could not know—they never did know. All of which they were conscious was that in an instant, from the tranquil melancholy around them of the great, dim, naked space, they were plunged into the din, the fury, the heat, the close, crushing, horrible entanglement of conflict, without the power to perceive or to number their foes, and only able to follow the sheer simple instincts of attack and of defense. All they were sensible of was one of those confused moments, deafening, blinding, filled with violence and rage and din—an eternity in semblance, a second in duration—that can never be traced, never be recalled, yet in whose feverish excitement men do that which, in their calmer hours, would look to them a fable of some Amadis of Gaul.

How they were attacked, how they resisted, how they struck, how they were encompassed, how they thrust back those who were hurled on them in the black night, with the north sea-wind like ice upon their faces, and the loose African soil drifting up in clouds of sand around them, they could never have told. Nor how they strained free from the armed ring that circled them, and beat aside the shafts of lances and the blades of swords, and forced their chargers breast to breast against the fence of steel, and through the tempest of rage, and blows, and shouts, and wind, and driven sand, cut their way through the foe whose very face they scarce could see, and plunged away into the shadows across the desolation of the plain, pursued, whether by one or by a thousand they could not guess; for the gallop was noiseless on the powdered soil, and the Arab yell of baffled passion and slaughterous lust was half drowned in the rising of the wind-storm. Had it been day, they would have seen their passage across the level

table-land traced by a crimson stream upon the sand, in which the blood of Frank and Arab blended equally.

As it was, they dashed headlong down through the darkness that grew yet denser and blacker as the storm rose. For miles the ground was level before them, and they had only to let the half-maddened horses, that had as by a miracle escaped all injury, rush on at their own will through the whirl of the wind that drove the dust upward in spiral columns and brought icy breaths of the north over the sear, sunburnt, southern wastes.

For a long space they had no sense but that of rapid ceaseless motion through the thick gloom and against the pressure of the violent blasts. The speed of their gallop and the strength of the currents of air were like some narcotic that drowned and that dizzied perception. In the intense darkness neither could see, neither hear, the other; the instinct of the beasts kept them together, but no word could be heard above the roar of the storm, and no light broke the somber veil of shadow through which they passed as fast as leopards course through the night. The first faint streak of dawn grew gray in the east when Cecil felt his charger stagger and sway beneath him, and halt, worn out and quivering in every sinew with fatigue. He threw himself off the animal in time to save himself from falling with it as it reeled and sank to the ground.

"Massena cannot stir another yard," he said. "Do you think they follow us still?"

There was no reply.

He strained his sight to pierce the darkness, but he could distinguish nothing: the gloom was still too deep. He spoke more loudly; still there was no reply. Then he raised his voice in a shout; it rang through the silence, and, when it ceased, the silence reigned again.

A deadly chill came on him. How had he missed his comrade? They must be far apart, he knew, since no response was given to his summons; or—the alternative rose before him with a terrible foreboding.

That intense quiet had a repose as of death in it, a ghastly loneliness that seemed filled with desolation. Hie horse was stretched before him on the sand, powerless to rise and drag itself a rood onward, and fast expiring. From the plains around him not a sound came, either of friend or foe. The consciousness that he was alone, that he had lost forever the only friend left to him, struck on him with that conviction which so often foreruns the assurance of calamity. Without a moment's pause, he plunged back in the direction he had come, leaving the charger on the ground to pant its life out as it must, and sought to feel his way along, so as to seek as best he could the companion he had deserted. He still could not see a rood before him, but he went on slowly, with some vague hope that he should ere long reach the man whom he knew death or the fatality of accident alone would keep from his side. He could not feel or hear anything that gave him the slightest sign or clew to aid his search; he only wandered farther from his horse, and risked falling afresh into the hands of his pursuers; he shouted again with all his strength, but his own voice alone echoed over the plains, while his heart stood still with the same frozen dread that a man feels when, wrecked on some barren shore, his cry for rescue rings back on his own ear over the waste of waters.

The flicker of the dawn was growing lighter in the sky, and he could see dimly now, as in some winter day's dark twilight, though all around him hung the leaden mist, with the wild winds driving furiously. It was with difficulty almost that he kept his feet against

their force; but he was blown onward by their current, though beaten from side to side, and he still made his way forward. He had repassed the ground already traversed by some hundred yards or more, which seemed the length of many miles in the hurricane that was driving over the earth and sky, when some outline still duskier than the dusky shadow caught his sight; it was the body of a horse, standing on guard over the fallen body of a man.

Another moment and he was beside them.

"My God! Are you hurt?"

He could see nothing but an indistinct and shapeless mass, without form or color, to mark it out from the brooding gloom and from the leaden earth. But the voice he knew so well answered him with the old love and fealty in it; eager with fear for him.

"When did you miss me, sir? I didn't mean you to know; I held on as long as I could; and when I couldn't no longer, I thought you was safe not to see I'd knocked over, so dark as it was."

"Great Heavens! You are hurt, then?"

"Just finished, sir. Lord! it don't matter. Only you ride on, Mr. Cecil; ride on, I say. Don't mind *me*."

"What is it? When were you struck? O Heaven! I never dreamt——"

Cecil hung over him, striving in vain through the shadows to read the truth from the face on which he felt by instinct the seal of death was set.

"I never meant you should know, sir. I meant just to drop behind, and die on the quiet. You see, sir, it was just this way; they hit me as we forced through them. There's the lance-head in my loins now. I pressed it in hard, and kept the blood from flowing, and thought I should hold out so till the sun rose. But

I couldn't do it so long; I got sick and faint after awhile, and I knew well enough it was death. So I dropped down while I'd sense left to check the horse and get out of saddle in silence. I hoped you wouldn't miss me, in the darkness and the noise the wind was making; and you didn't hear me then, sir; I was glad."

His voice was checked in a quick gasping breath; his only thought had been to lie down and die in solitude so that his master might be saved.

A great sob shook Cecil as he heard; no false hope came to him; he felt that this man was lost to him forever, that this was the sole recompense which the cruelty of Africa would give to a fidelity passing the fidelity of woman; these throes of dissolution the only payment with which fate would ever requite a loyalty that had held no travail weary, no exile pain, and no danger worthy counting, so long as they were encountered and endured in his own service.

"Don't take on about it, sir," whispered Rake, striving to raise his head that he might strain his eyes better through the gloom to see his master's face. "It was sure to come some time; and I ain't in no pain—to speak of. Do leave me, Mr. Cecil—leave me, for God's sake, and save yourself!"

"Did you leave me?"

The answer was very low, and his voice shook as he uttered it; but through the roar of the hurricane Rake heard it.

"That was different, sir," he said, simply. "Let me lie here, and go you on. It'll soon be over, and there's naught to be done."

"O God! is no help possible?"

"Don't take on, sir; it's no odds. I allays was a scamp, and scamps die game, you know. My life's been

a rare spree, count it all and all; and it's a great good thing, you see, sir, to go off quick like this. I might have been laid in hospital. If you'd only take the beast and ride on, sir——"

"Hush! hush! Would you make me coward, or brute, or both?"

The words broke in an agony from him. The time had been when he had been himself stretched in what he had thought was death, in just such silence, in just such solitude, upon the bare baked earth, far from men's aid, and near only to the hungry eyes of watching beasts of prey. Then he had been very calm, and waited with indifference for the end; now his eyes swept over the remorseless wastes, that were growing faintly visible under the coming dawn, with all the impatience, the terror, of despair. Death had smitten down many beside him; buoyant youth and dauntless manhood he had seen a thousand times swept under the great waves of war and lost forever; but it had an anguish for him here that he would never have known had he felt his own life-blood well out over the sand. The whole existence of this man had been sacrificed for him, and its only reward was a thrust of a lance in a midnight fray—a grave in an alien soil.

His grief fell dully on ears half deafened already to the sounds of the living world. The exhaustion that follows on great loss of blood was upon the soldier who for the last half hour had lain there in the darkness and the stillness, quietly waiting death, and not once seeking even to raise his voice for succor lest the cry should reach and should imperil his master.

The morning had broken now, but the storm had not lulled. The northern winds were sweeping over the plains in tenfold violence, and the rains burst and poured, with the fury of water-spouts, on the crust of the

parched, cracked earth. Around them there was nothing heard or seen except the leaden angry mists, tossed to and fro under the hurricane, and the white light of the coming day breaking lividly through the clouds. The world held no place of more utter desolation, more unspeakable loneliness; and in its misery, Cecil, flung down upon the sands beside him, could do nothing except—helpless to aid, and powerless to save—watch the last breath grow feebler and feebler, until it faded out from the only life that had been faithful to him.

By the fitful gleams of day he could see the blood slowly ebbing out from the great gap where the lance-head was still bedded with its wooden shaft snapped in two; he could see the drooped head that he had raised upon his knee, with the yellow northern curls that no desert suns had darkened; and Rake's eyes, smiling so brightly and so bravely still, looked up from under their weary lids to his.

"I'd never let you take my hand before, sir; just take it once now—will you?—while I can see you still."

Their hands met as he asked it, and held each other close and long; all the loyal service of the one life, and all the speechless gratitude of the other, told better than by all words in that one farewell.

A light that was not from the stormy dusky morning shone over the soldier's face.

"Time was, sir," he said, with a smile, "when I used to think as how, some day or another, when I should have done something great and grand, and you was back among your own again, and they here had given me the Cross, I'd have asked you to have done that before all the Army, and just to have said to 'em, if so you'd liked, 'He was a scamp, and he wasn't thought good for naught; but he kep' true to me, and you see it made him go straight, and I aren't ashamed

to call him my friend.' I used to think that, sir, though 'twas silly, perhaps. But it's best as it is—a deal best, no doubt. If you was only back safe in camp——"

"O God! cease! I am not worthy one thought of love like yours."

"Yes, you are, sir—leastways you was to me. When you took pity on me, it was just a toss up if I didn't go right to the gallows. Dont grieve that way, Mr. Cecil. If I could just have seen you home again in your place, I should have been glad—that's all. You'll go back one day, sir; when you do, tell the King I ain't never forgot him."

His voice grew faint as the last sentence stole from his lips; he lay quite still, his head leant back against his master; and the day came, with the north winds driving over the plains, and the gray mists tossed by them to and fro like smoke.

There was a long silence, a pause in which the windstorm ceased, and the clouds of the loosed sands sunk. Alone, with the wastes stretching around them, were the living and the dying man, with the horse standing motionless beside them, and, above, the gloom of the sullen sky. No aid was possible: they could but wait, in the stupefaction of despair, for the end of all to come.

In that awful stillness, in that sudden lull in the madness of the hurricane, death had a horror which it never wore in the riot of the battle-field, in the intoxication of the slaughter. There was no pity in earth or heaven; the hard hot ground sucked down its fill of blood; the icy air enwrapped them like a shroud.

The faithfulness of love, the strength of gratitude, were of no avail; the one perished in agony, the other was powerless to save.

In that momentary hush, as the winds sank low, the heavy eyes, half sightless now, sought with their old wistful dog-like loyalty the face to which so soon they would be blind for ever.

"Would you tell me once, sir—now? I never asked—I never would have done—but may be I might know in this last minute; you never sinned that sin you bear the charge on?"

"God is my witness, no."

The light, that was like sunlight, shone once more in the aching, wandering eyes.

"I knew, I knew! It was——"

Cecil bowed his head over him, lower and lower.

"Hush! He was but a child; and I——"

With a sudden and swift motion, as though new life were thrilling in him, Rake raised himself erect, his arms stretched outward to the east, where the young day was breaking.

"I knew, I knew! *I* never doubted. You will go back to your own some day, and men shall learn the truth—thank God, thank God!"

Then, with that light still on his face, his head fell backward; and with one quick, brief sigh his life fled out forever.

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The time passed on; the storm had risen afresh; the violence of the gusts blew yellow sheets of sand whirling over the plains. Alone, with the dead across his knees, Cecil sat motionless as though turned to stone. His eyes were dry and fixed; but ever and again a great tearless sob shook him from head to foot. The only life that linked him with the past, the only love that had suffered all things for his sake, were gone, crushed out as though they never had been, like some insect trodden in the soil.

He had lost all consciousness, all memory, save of that lifeless thing which lay across his knees, like a felled tree, like a broken log, with a glimmer of the tempestuous day so chill and white upon the upturned face.

He was alone on earth; and the solitudes around him were not more desolate than his own fate.

He was like a man numbed and stupefied by intense cold; his veins seemed stagnant, and his sight could only see those features that became so terribly serene, so fearfully unmoved with the dread calm of death. Yet the old mechanical instincts of a soldier guided him still; he vaguely knew that his errand had to be done, must be done, let his heart ache as it would, let him long as he might to lie down by the side of his only friend, and leave the torture of life to grow still in him also for evermore.

Instinctively, he moved to carry out the duty trusted to him. He looked east and west, north and south; there was nothing in sight that could bring him aid; there were only the dust-clouds hurled in billows hither and thither by the bitter winds still blowing from the sea. All that could be done had to be done by himself alone. His own safety hung on the swiftness of his flight: for aught he knew, at every moment, out of the mist and the driven sheets of sand there might rush the desert-horses of his foes But this memory was not with him: all he thought of was that burden stretched across his limbs, which, laid down one hour here unwatched, would be the prey of the jackal and the vulture. He raised it reverently in his arms, and with long laborious effort drew its weight up across the saddle of the charger which stood patiently waiting by, turning its docile eyes with a plaintive wondering sadness on the body of the rider it had loved. Then he

And so he rode, with no companion save the dead.

mounted himself; and with the head of his lost comrade borne up upon his arm, and rested gently on his breast, he rode westward over the great plain to where his mission lay.

The horse paced slowly beneath the double load of dead and living; he would not urge the creature faster on; every movement that shook the drooping limbs, or jarred the repose of that last sleep, seemed desecration. He passed the place where his own horse was stretched; the vultures were already there. He shuddered; and then pressed faster on, as though the beasts and birds of prey would rob him of his burden ere he could give it sanctuary. And so he rode, mile after mile, over the barren land, with no companion save the dead.

The winds blew fiercely in his teeth; the sand was in his eyes and hair; the way was long, and weary, and sown thick with danger; but he knew of nothing, felt and saw nothing save that one familiar face so strangely changed and transfigured by that glory with which death had touched it.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"JE VOUS ACHÈTE VOTRE VIE."

Thus burdened, he made his way for over two leagues. The hurricane never abated, and the blinding dust rose around him in great waves. The horse fell lame; he had to dismount, and move slowly and painfully over the loose heavy soil on foot, raising the drooping head of the lifeless rider. It was bitter, weary, cruel travail, of an intolerable labor, of an intolerable pain.

Once or twice he grew sick and giddy, and lost for a moment all consciousness; but he pressed onward, resolute not to yield and leave the vultures *hovering aloft their prey*. He was still somewhat weakened by the wounds of Zaraila; he had been bruised and exhausted by the skirmish of the past night; he was weary and heart-broken; but he did not yield to his longing to sink down on the sands, and let his life ebb out: he held patiently onward through the infinite misery of the passage. At last he drew near the caravanserai where he had been directed to obtain a change of horses. It stood midway in the distance that he had to traverse, and almost alone when the face of the country changed, and was more full of color, and more broken into rocky and irregular surface.

As a man walks in a dream, he led the sinking beast toward its shelter, as its irregular corner towers became dimly perceptible to him through the dizzy mists that had obscured his sight. By sheer instinct he found his route straight toward the open arch of its entrance-way, and into the square court-yard thronged with mules, and camels, and horses; for the caravanserai stood on the only road that led through that district to the south, and was the only house of call for drovers, or shelter for travelers and artists of Europe who might pass that way. The groups in the court paused in their converse and in their occupations, and looked in awe at the gray charger with its strange burden, and the French Chasseur who came so blindly forward like a man feeling his passage through the dark. There was something in the sight that had a vague terror for them before they clearly saw what this thing was which was thus brought into their presence. Cecil moved slowly on into their midst, his hand on the horse's rein; then a great darkness covered his sight; he swayed to and fro, and fell

senseless on the gray stone of the paved court, while the muleteers and the camel-drivers, the Kabyls and the French, who were mingled there, crowded around him in fear and in wonder. When consciousness returned to him, he was lying on a stone bench in the shadow of the wall, with the coolness of the fountain water bubbling near, and a throng of lean, bronzed, eager faces about him in the mid-day sunlight which had broken through the wind-storm.

Instantly he remembered all.

"Where is *he?*" he asked.

They knew that he meant the dead man, and answered him in a hushed murmur of many voices. They had placed the body gently down within, in a darkened chamber.

A shiver passed over him; he stretched his hand out for water that they held to him.

"Saddle me a fresh horse; I have my work to do."

He knew that for no friendship, or grief, or suffering, or self-pity might a soldier pause by the wayside while his errand was still undone, his duty unfulfilled.

He drank the water thirstily; then reeling slightly from the weakness that was still upon him, he rose, rejecting their offers of aid. "Take me to him," he said simply. They understood him; there were French soldiers among them, and they took him, without question or comment, across the court to the little square stone cell within one of the towers, where they had laid the corpse, with nothing to break the quiet and the solitude except the low, soft cooing of some doves that had their homes in its dark corners, and flew in and out at pleasure through the oval aperture that served as window.

He motioned them all back with his hand, and went

into the gloom of the chamber alone. Not one among them followed.

When he came forth again the reckless and riotous *fantassins* of France turned silently and reverentially away, so that they should not look upon his face. For it was well known throughout the army that no common tie had bound together the exiles of England, and the fealty of comrade to comrade was sacred in their sight.

The fresh animal, saddled, was held ready outside the gates. He crossed the court, moving still like a man without sense of what he did; he had the instinct to carry out the mission trusted to him, instantly and accurately, but he had no distinct perception or memory of aught else save of those long-familiar features of which, ere he could return, the cruel sun of Africa would not have spared one trace.

He passed under the shadow of the gateway arch—a shadow black and intense against the golden light which, with the ceasing of the storm, flooded the land in the full morning. There were movement, noise, change, haste in the entrance. Besides the arrival of the detachment of the line and a string of northward-bound camels, the retinue of some travelers of rank was preparing for departure, and the resources of the humble caravanserai were taxed beyond their powers. The name that some of the hurrying grooms shouted loudly in their impatience broke through his stupor and reached him. It was that of the woman whom, however madly, he loved with all the strength of a passion born out of utter hopelessness. He turned to the outrider nearest him:

"You are of the Princess Corona's suite? What does she do here?"

"Madame travels to see the country and the war."

"The war? This is no place for her. The land is alive with danger—rife with death."

"Miladi travels with M. le Duc, her brother. Miladi does not know what fear is."

"But——"

The remonstrance died on his lips; he stood gazing out from the gloom of the arch at a face close to him, on which the sun shone full, a face unseen for twelve long years, and which, a moment before laughing and careless in the light, changed, and grew set, and rigid, and pale with the pallor of an unutterable horror. His own flushed, and moved, and altered with a wholly different emotion,—emotion that was, above all, of an intense and yearning tenderness. For a moment both stood motionless and speechless; then, with a marvelous self-command and self-restraint, Cecil brought his hand to his brow in military salute, passed with the impassiveness of a soldier who passed a gentleman, reached his charger, and rode away upon his errand over the brown and level ground.

He had known his brother in that fleeting glance, but he hoped that his brother would see no more in him than a French trooper who bore resemblance by a strange hazard to one long believed to be dead and gone. The instinct of generosity, the instinct of self-sacrifice, moved him now as, long ago one fatal night, they had moved him to bear the sin of his mother's darling as his own.

Full remembrance, full consideration of what he had done, never came to him as he dashed on across the many leagues that still lay between him and his goal. His one impulse had been to spare the other from the knowledge that he lived; his one longing was to have the hardness and the bitterness of his own life buried in the oblivion of a soldier's grave.

* * * * * *

Within six and thirty hours the instructions he bore were in the tent of the Chef du Bataillon whom they were to direct, and he himself returned to the caravanserai to fulfill with his own hand to the dead those last offices which he would delegate to none. It was night when he arrived; all was still and deserted. He inquired if the party of tourists was gone; they answered him in the affirmative; there only remained the detachment of the French infantry, which were billeted there for awhile.

It was in the coolness and the hush of the night, with the great stars shining clearly over the darkness of the plains, that they made the single grave, under a leaning shelf of rock, with the somber fans of a pine spread above it, and nothing near but the sleeping herds of goats. The sullen echo of the soldiers' muskets gave its only funeral requiem; and the young lambs and kids in many a future spring-time would come and play, and browse, and stretch their little tired limbs upon its sod, its sole watchers in the desolation of the plains.

When all was over, and the startled flocks had settled once again to rest and slumber, Cecil still remained there alone. Thrown down upon the grave, he never moved as hour after hour went by. To others that lonely and unnoticed tomb would be as nothing; only one among the thousand marks left on the bosom of the violated earth by the ravenous and savage lusts of war. But to him it held all that had bound him to his lost youth, his lost country, his lost peace; all that had remained of the years that were gone, and were now as a dream of the night. This man had followed him, cleaved to him, endured misery and rejected honor for his sake; and all the recompense such a life received was to be stilled forever by a spear-thrust of an un-

known foe, unthanked, undistinguished, unavenged! It seemed to him like murder—murder with which his own hand was stained.

The slow night hours passed; in the stillness that had succeeded to the storm of the past day there was not a sound except the bleating of the young goats straying from the herd. He lay prostrate under the black boughs of the pine; the exhaustion of great fatigue was on him; a grief, acute as remorse, consumed him for the man who, following his fate, had only found at the end a nameless and lonely grave in the land of his exile.

He started with a thrill of almost superstitious fear as through the silence he heard a name whispered—the name of his childhood, of his past.

He sprang to his feet, and as he turned in the moonlight he saw once more his brother's face, pale as the face of the dead, and strained with an agonizing dread. Concealment was no longer possible: the younger man knew that the elder lived; knew it by a strange and irresistible certainty that needed no proof, that left no place for hope or fear in its chill, leaden, merciless conviction.

For some moments neither spoke. A flood of innumerable memories choked thought or word in both. They knew each other—all was said in that.

Cecil was the first to break the silence. He moved nearer with a rapid movement, and his hand fell heavily on the other's shoulder.

"Have you lived stainlessly *since?*"

The question was stern as the demand of a judge. His brother shuddered beneath this touch, and covered his face with his hands.

"God is my witness, yes! But you—you—they said that you were dead!" * * * *

Cecil's hand fell from his shoulder. There was that

in the words which smote him more cruelly than any Arab steel could have done; there was the accent of *regret.*

"I am dead," he said simply, "dead to the world and you."

He who bore the title of Royallieu covered his face.

"How have you lived?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Honorably. Let that suffice. And you?"

The other looked up at him with a piteous appeal—the old timorous, terrified appeal that had been so often seen on the boy's face, strangely returning on the gracious and mature beauty of the man.

"In honor too, I swear! That was my first disgrace, and my last. You bore the weight of my shame? Good God, what can I say? Such nobility, such sacrifice——"

He would have said enough, more than enough, to satisfy the one who had lost all for his sake, had there but been once in his voice no *fear*, but only love. As it was, that which he still thought of was himself alone. While crushed with the weight of his brother's surpassing generosity, he still was filled with only one thought that burned through the darkness of his bewildered horror, and that thought was his own jeopardy. Even in the very first hours of his knowledge that the man whom he had believed dead was living, living and bearing the burden of the guilt he should have borne, what he was filled with was the imminence of his own peril.

Cecil stood in silence looking at him. He saw the boyish loveliness he remembered so well altered into the stronger and fuller beauty of the man. He saw that life had gone softly, smoothly, joyously, with this weak and feminine nature; and that, in the absence of

temptation to evil, its career had been fair and straight in the sight of the world. He saw that his brother had been, in one word, happy. He saw that happiness had done for this character what adversity had done for his own. He saw that by it had been saved a temperament that calamity would have wrecked. He stood and looked at him, but he spoke not one word; whatever he felt, he restrained from all expression.

The younger man still hid his face upon his hands, as if, even in those pale gray moonbeams, he shunned the light that was about him.

"We believed you were dead," he murmured, wildly. "They said so; there seemed every proof. But when I saw you yesterday, I knew you—I knew you, though you passed me as a stranger. I stayed on here; they told me you would return. God! what agony this day and night have been!"

Cecil was silent still; he knew that this agony had been *the dread* lest he should be living.

There were many emotions at war in him—scorn, and pity, and wounded love, and pride too proud to sue for a gratitude denied, or quote a sacrifice that was almost without parallel in generosity, all held him speechless. To overwhelm the sinner before him with reproaches, to count and claim the immeasurable debts due to him, to upbraid and to revile the wretched weakness that had left the soil of a guilt not his own to rest upon him—to do aught of this was not in him. Long ago he had accepted the weight of an alien crime, and borne it as his own; to undo now all that he had done in the past, to fling out to ruin now the one whom he had saved at such a cost, to turn, after twelve years, and forsake the man, all coward though he was, whom he had shielded for so long—this was not possible to him. Though it would be but his own birthright that he

would demand, his own justification that he would establish, it would have seemed to him like a treacherous and craven thing. No matter that the one for whom the sacrifice had been made was unworthy of it, he held that every law of honor and justice forbade him now to abandon his brother, and yield him up to the retribution of his early fault. It might have been a folly in the first instance, it might even have been a madness, that choice of standing in his brother's place to receive the shame of his brother's action; but it had been done so long before—done on the spur of generous affection, and actuated by the strange hazard that made the keeping of a woman's secret demand the same reticence which also saved the young lad's name; to draw back from it now would have been a cowardice impossible to his nature.

All seemed uttered, without words, by their gaze at one another. He could not speak with tenderness to this craven who had been false to the fair repute of their name:—and he would not speak with harshness. He felt too sick at heart, too weary, too filled with pain, to ask aught of his brother's life; it had been saved from temptation, and therefore saved from evil; that knowledge sufficed to him.

The younger man stood half stupefied, half maddened. In the many years that had passed by, although his character had not changed, his position had altered greatly; and in the last few months he had enjoyed all the power that wealth and independence and the accession to his title could bestow. He felt some dull, hot, angered sense of wrong done to him by the fact that the rightful heir of them still lived; some chafing, ingrate, and unreasoning impatience with the savior of his whole existence; some bitter pangs of conscience that he would be baser yet, base beyond all baseness, to

remain in his elder's place, and accept this sacrifice still, while knowing now the truth.

"Bertie—Bertie!" he stammered, in hurried appeal —and the name of his youth touched the hearer of it strangely, making him for the moment forget all save that he looked once more upon one of his own race— "on my soul, I never doubted that the story of your death was true. No one did. All the world believed it. If I had known you lived, I would have said that you were innocent; I would—I would have told them how I forged your friend's name and your own when I was so desperate that I scarce knew what I did. But they said that you were killed, and I thought then—then—it was not worth while; it would have broken my father's heart. God help me! I was a coward!"

He spoke the truth; he was a coward; he had ever been one. Herein lay the whole story of his fall, his weakness, his sin, and his ingratitude. Cecil knew that never will gratitude exist where craven selfishness holds reign; yet there was an infinite pity mingled with the scorn that moved him. After the years of bitter endurance he had passed, the heroic endurance he had witnessed, the hard and unending miseries that he had learned to take as his daily portion, this feebleness and fear roused his wondering compassion almost as a woman's weakness would have done. Still he never answered; the hatred of the stain that had been brought upon their name by his brother's deed (stain none the less dark, in his sight, because hidden from the world), his revulsion from this man, who was the only creature of their race who ever had turned poltroon, the thousand remembrances of childhood that uprose before him, the irresistible yearning for some word from the other's lips that should tell of some lingering trace in him of the old love strong enough to kill, for the moment at

least, the selfish horror of personal peril—all these kept him silent.

His brother misinterpreted that silence.

"I am in your power—utterly in your power," he moaned in his fear. "I stand in your place; I bear your title; you know that our father and our brother are dead? All that I have inherited is yours—do you know that, since you have never claimed it?"

"I know it."

"And you have never come forward to take your rights?"

"What I did not do to clear my own honor, I was not likely to do merely to hold a title."

The meaning of his answer drifted beyond the ear on which his words fell; it was too high to be comprehended by the lower nature. The man who lived in prosperity and peace, and in the smile of the world, and the purple of power, looked bewildered at the man who led the simple, necessitous, perilous, semi-barbaric existence of an Arab-Franco soldier.

"But—great Heaven!—this life of yours? It must be wretchedness?"

"Perhaps. It has at least no disgrace in it."

The reply had the only sternness of contempt that he had suffered himself to show. It stung down to his listener's soul.

"No—no!" he murmured. "You are happier than I. You have no remorse to bear! And yet—to tell the world that I am guilty!——"

"You need never tell it; I shall not."

He spoke quite quietly, quite patiently. Yet he well knew, and had well weighed, all he surrendered in that promise—the promise to condemn himself to a barren and hopeless fate forever.

"You will not?"

The question died almost inaudible on his dry, parched tongue. The one passion of fear upon him was for himself; even in that moment of supplication his disordered thoughts hovered wildly over the chances of whether, if his elder brother even now asserted his innocence and claimed his birthright, the world and its judges would ever believe him.

Cecil for awhile again was silent, standing there by the newly made grave of the soldier who had been faithful as those of his own race and of his own order never had been. His heart was full. The ingratitude and the self-absorption of this life for which his own had been destroyed smote him with a fearful suffering. And only a few hours before he had looked once more on the face of the beloved friend of his youth;—a deadlier sacrifice than to lay down wealth, and name, and heritage, and the world's love, was to live on leaving that one comrade of his early days to believe him dead after a deed of shame.

His brother sank down on the mound of freshly flung earth, sinking his head upon his arms with a low moan. Time had not changed him greatly; it had merely made him more intensely desirous of the pleasures and the powers of life, more intensely abhorrent of pain, of censure, of the contempt of the world. As, to escape these in his boyhood, he had stooped to any degradation, so, to escape them in his manhood, he was capable of descending to any falsehood or any weakness. His was one of those natures which, having no love of evil for evil's sake, still embrace any form of evil which may save them from the penalty of their own weakness. Now, thus meeting one whom for twelve years he had believed must rise from the tomb itself to reproach or to accuse him, unstrung his every nerve,

and left him with only one consciousness—the desire at all costs to be saved.

Cecil's eyes rested on him with a strange melancholy pity: he had loved his brother as a youth—loved him well enough to take and bear a heavy burden of disgrace in his stead. The old love was not dead; but stronger than itself was his hatred of the shame that had touched their race by the wretched crime that had driven him into exile, and his wondering scorn for the feeble and self-engrossed character that had lived contentedly under false colors, and with a hidden plot screened by a fictitious semblance of honor. He could not linger with him; he did not know how to support the intolerable pain that oppressed him in the presence of the only living creature of his race; he could not answer for himself what passionate and withering words might not escape him; every instant of their interview was a horrible temptation to him—the temptation to demand from this coward his own justification before the world—the temptation to seize out of these unworthy hands his birthright and his due.

But the temptation, sweet, insidious, intense, strengthened by the strength of right, and well-nigh overwhelming with all its fair delicious promise for the future, did not conquer him. What resisted it was his own simple instinct of justice; an instinct too straight and true either to yield to self-pity or to passionate desire—justice which made him feel that, since he had chosen to save this weakling once for their lost mother's sake, he was bound forever not to repent nor to retract. He gazed awhile longer, silently, at the younger man, who sat still rocking himself wearily to and fro on the loose earth of the freshly filled grave. Then he went and laid his hand on his brother' shoulder: the other

started and trembled; he remembered that touch in days of old.

"Do not fear me," he said, gently and very gravely. "I have kept your secret twelve years; I will keep it still. Be happy—be as happy as you can. All I bid of you in return is so to live that in your future your past shall be redeemed."

The words of the saint to the thief, "*Je vous achète votre vie*," were not more merciful, not more noble, than the words with which he purchased, at the sacrifice of his own life, the redemption of his brother's. The other looked at him with a look that was half of terror —terror at the magnitude of this ransom that was given to save him from the bondage of evil.

"My God! You cannot mean it! And you——?"

"I shall lead the life fittest for me: I am content in it. It is enough."

The answer was very calm, but it choked him in its utterance. Before his memory rose one fair, proud face. "Content!" Ah, Heaven!—it was the only lie that had ever passed his lips.

His hand lay still upon his brother's shoulder, leaning more heavily there, in the silence that brooded over the hushed plains.

"Let us part now, and forever. Leave Algeria at once. That is all I ask."

Then, without another word that could add reproach or seek for gratitude, he turned and went away over the great dim level of the African waste, while the man whom he had saved sat as in stupor, gazing at the brown shadows, and the sleeping herds, and the falling stars that ran across the sky, and doubting whether the voice he had heard and the face upon which he had looked were not the visions of a waking dream.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"VENETIA."

How that night was spent Cecil could never recall in full. Vague memories remained with him of wandering over the shadowy country, of seeking by bodily fatigue to kill the thoughts rising in him, of drinking at a little water-channel in the rocks as thirstily as some driven deer, of flinging himself down at length, worn out, to sleep under the hanging brow of a mighty wall of rock; of waking when the dawn was reddening the east with the brown plains around him, and far away under a knot of palms was a goatherd with his flock like an idyl from the old pastoral life of Syria. He stood looking at the light which heralded the sun, with some indefinite sense of heavy loss, of fresh calamity, upon him. It was only slowly that he remembered all. Years seemed to have been pressed into the three nights and days since he had sat by the bivouac-fire, listening to the fiery words of the little Friend of the Flag.

The full consciousness of all that he had surrendered in yielding up afresh his heritage rolled in on his memory like the wave of some heavy sea that sweeps down all before it.

When that tear-blotted and miserable letter had reached him in the green alleys of the Stephanien, and confessed to him that his brother had relied on the personal likeness between them and the similarity of their handwriting to pass off as his the bill in which his own name and that of his friend were forged, no thought had crossed him to take upon himself the lad's sin. It had only been when, brought under the charge,

he must, to clear himself, have at once accused the boy and have betrayed the woman whose reputation was in his keeping, that rather by generous impulse than by studied intention he had taken up the burden that he had now carried for so long. Whether or no the money-lenders had been themselves in reality deceived he could never tell; but it had been certain that, having avowed themselves confident of his guilt, they could never shift the charge on to his brother in the face of his own acceptance of it. So he had saved the youth without premeditation or reckoning of the cost. And now that the full cost was known to him, he had not shrunk back from its payment. Yet that payment was one that gave him a greater anguish than if he had laid down his life in physical martyrdom.

To go back to the old luxury, and ease, and careless peace, to go back to the old fresh fair English woodlands, to go back to the power of command and the delight of free gifts, to go back to men's honor, and reverence, and high esteem—these would have been sweet enough—sweet as food after long famine. But far more than these would it have been to go back and take the hand of his friend once more in the old unclouded trust of their youth; to go back, and stand free and blameless among his peers, and know that all that man could do to win the heart and the soul of a woman he could at his will do to win hers whose mere glance of careless pity had sufficed to light his life to passion. And he had renounced all this. This was the cost: and he had paid it—paid it because the simple, natural, inflexible law of justice had demanded it.

One whom he had once chosen to save he could not now have deserted, except by what would have been, in his sight, dishonor. Therefore, when the day broke,

and the memories of the night came with his awakening, he knew that his future was without hope—without it as utterly as was ever that of any captive shut in darkness, and silence, and loneliness, in a prison, whose only issue was the oubliettes. There is infinite misery in the world, but this one misery is rare; or men would perish from the face of the earth as though the sun withdrew its light.

Alone in that dreary scene, beautiful from its vastness and its solemnity, but unutterably melancholy, unutterably oppressive, he also wondered whether he lived or dreamed.

From among the reeds the plovers were rising; over the barren rocks the dazzling lizards glided; afar off strayed the goats: that was the only sign of animal existence. He had wandered a long way from the caravanserai, and he began to retrace his steps, for his horse was there, and although he had received license to take leisure in returning, he had no home but the camp, no friends but those wild-eyed, leopard-like, ferocious sons of the razzia and the slaughter, who would throng around him like a pack of dogs, each eager for the first glance, the first word; these companions of his adversity and of his perils, whom he had learned to love, with all their vices and all their crimes, for sake of the rough, courageous love that they could give in answer.

He moved slowly back over the desolate tracks of land stretched between him and the Algerian halting-place. He had no fear that he would find his brother there. He knew too well the nature with which he had to deal to hope that old affection would so have outweighed present fear that his debtor would have stayed to meet him yet once more. On the impulse of the ungovernable pain which the other's presence had been,

he had bidden him leave Africa at once; now he almost wished that he had bid him stay. There was a weary unsatisfied longing for some touch of love or of gratitude from this usurper, whom he had raised in his place. He would have been rewarded enough if *one* sign of gladness that he lived had broken through the egotism and the stricken fear of the man whom he remembered as a little golden-headed child, with the hand of their dying mother lying in benediction on the fair silken curls.

He had asked no questions. He had gone back to no recriminations. He guessed all it needed him to know; and he recoiled from the recital of the existence whose happiness was purchased by his own misery, and whose dignity was built on sand. His sacrifice had not been in vain. Placed out of the reach of temptation, the plastic, feminine, unstable character had been without a stain in the sight of men; but it was little better at the core; and he wondered, in his suffering, as he went onward through the beauty of the young day, whether it had been worth the bitter price he had paid to raise this bending reed from out the waters which would have broken and swamped it at the outset. It grew fair, and free, and flower-crowned now, in the midst of a tranquil and sunlit lake; but was it of more value than a drifted weed bearing the snake-egg hidden at its root?

He had come so far out of the ordinary route across the plains that it was two hours or more before he saw the dark gray square of the caravanserai walls, and to its left that single leaning pine growing out of a cleft within the rock that overhung the spot where the keenest anguish of all his life had known had been encountered and endured—the spot which yet, for sake of the one laid to rest there, beneath the somber branches,

would be forever dearer to him than any other place in the soil of Africa.

While yet the caravanserai was distant, the piteous cries of a mother-goat caught his ear; she was bleating beside a water-course, into which her kid of that spring had fallen, and whose rapid swell, filled by the recent storm, was too strong for the young creature. Absorbed as he was in his own thoughts, the cry reached him and drew him to the spot; it was not in him willingly to let any living thing suffer, and he was always gentle to all animals. He stooped, and, with some little difficulty, rescued the little goat for its delighted dam.

As he bent over the water, he saw something glitter beneath it; he caught it in his hand and brought it up; it was the broken half of a chain of gold, with a jewel in each link. He changed color as he saw it; he remembered it as one that Venetia Corona had worn on the morning that he had been admitted to her. It was of peculiar workmanship, and he recognized it at once. He stood with the toy in his hand, looking long at the shining links, with their flashes of precious stones. They seemed to have voices that spoke to him of her about whose beautiful white throat they had been woven—voices that whispered ncessantly in his ear, "Take up your birthright, and you will be free to sue to her at least, if not to win her." No golden and jeweled plaything ever tempted a starving man to theft as this tempted him now to break the pledge he had just given.

His birthright! He longed for it for this woman's sake—for the sake, at least, of the right to stand before her as an equal, and to risk his chance with others who sought her smile,—as he had never done for any other thing which, with that heritage, would have become his. Yet he knew that, even were he to be false to his

word, and go forward and claim his right, he would never be able to prove his innocence; he would never hope to make the world believe him unless the real criminal made that confession which he held himself forbidden, by his own past action, ever to extort.

He gazed long at the broken costly toy, while his heart ached with a cruel pang; then he placed it in safety in the little blue enamel box, beside the ring which Cigarette had flung back to him, and went onward to the caravanserai. She was no longer there, in all probability; but the lost bagatelle would give him, some time or another, a plea on which to enter her presence. It was a pleasure to him to know that;—though he knew also that every added moment spent under the sweet sovereignty of her glance was so much added pain, so much added folly, to the dreamlike and baseless passion with which she had inspired him.

The trifling incident of the goat's rescue and the chain's trouvaille, slight as they were, still were of service to him. They called him back from the past to the present; they broke the stupor of suffering that had fastened on him; they recalled him to the actual world about him in which he had to fulfill his duties as a trooper of France.

It was almost noon when, under the sun-scorched branches of the pine that stretched its somber fans up against the glittering azure of the morning skies, he approached the gates of the Algerine house-of-call—a study for the color of Gérôme, with the pearly gray of its stone tints, and the pigeons wheeling above its corner towers, while under the arch of its entrance a string of mules, maize-laden, were guided; and on its bench sat a French fantassin, singing gayly songs of Paris while he cut open a yellow gourd.

Cecil went within, and bathed, and dressed, and

drank some of the thin cool wine that found its way hither in the wake of the French army. Then he sat down for awhile at one of the square cabin-like holes which served for casements in the tower he occupied, and, looking out into the court, tried to shape his thoughts and plan his course. As a soldier he had no freedom, no will of his own, save for this extra twelve or twenty-four hours which they had allowed him for leisure in his return journey. He was obliged to go back to his camp, and there, he knew, he might again encounter one whose tender memories would be as quick to recognize him as the craven dread of his brother had been. He had always feared this ordeal, although the arduous service in which his chief years in Africa had been spent, and the remote expeditions on which he had always been employed, had partially removed him from the ever-present danger of such recognition until now. And now he felt that if once the brave kind eyes of his old friend should meet his own, concealment would be no longer possible, yet, for sake of that promise he had sworn in the past night, it must be maintained at every hazard, every cost. Vacantly he sat and watched the play of the sunshine in the prismatic water of the court-yard fountain, and the splashing, and the pluming, and the murmuring of the doves and pigeons on its edge. He felt meshed in a net from which there was no escape—none—unless, on his homeward passage, a thrust of Arab steel should give him liberty.

The trampling of horses on the pavement below roused his attention. A thrill of hope went through him that his brother might have lingering conscience, latent love enough, to have made him refuse to obey the bidding to leave Africa. He rose and leaned out. Amid the little throng of riding-horses, grooms, and

attendants who made an open way through the polyglot crowd of an Algerian caravanserai at noon, he saw the one dazzling face of which he had so lately dreamed by the water-freshet in the plains. It was but a moment's glance, for she had already dismounted from her mare, and was passing within with two other ladies of her party; but in that one glance he knew her. His discovery of the chain gave him a plea to seek her;—should he avail himself of it? He hesitated awhile; it would be safest, wisest, best, to deliver up the trinket to her courier, and pass on his way without another look at that beauty which could never be his, which could never lighten for him even with the smile that a woman may give her equal or her friend. She could never be aught to him save one more memory of pain, save one remembrance the more to embitter the career which not even hope would ever illumine. He knew that it was only madness to go into her presence, and feed, with the cadence of her voice, the gold light of her hair, the grace and graciousness of her every movement, the love which she would deem such intolerable insult, that, did he ever speak it, she would order her people to drive him from her like a chidden hound. He knew that; but he longed to indulge the madness despite it; and he did so. He went down into the court below, and found her suite.

"Tell your mistress that I, Louis Victor, have some jewels which belong to her, and ask her permission to restore them to her hands," he said to one of her equerries.

"Give them to me, if you have picked them up," said the man, putting out his hand for them.

Cecil closed his own upon them:

"Go and do as I bid you."

The equerry paused, doubtful whether or no to resist

the tone and the words. A Frenchman's respect for the military uniform prevailed; he went within.

In the best chamber of the caravanserai, Venetia Corona was sitting, listless in the heat, when her attendant entered. The *grandes dames* who were her companions in their tour through the seat of war, were gone to their siesta. She was alone, with a scarlet burnous thrown about her, and upon her all the languor and idleness common to the noontide, which was still very warm, though, in the autumn, the nights were so icily cold on the exposed level of the plains. She was lost in thought, moreover. She had heard, the day before, a story that had touched her—of a soldier who had been slain crossing the plains, and had been brought, through the hurricane and the sand-storm, at every risk, by his comrade, who had chosen to endure all peril and wretchedness rather than leave the dead body to the vultures and the kites. It was a nameless story to her—the story of two obscure troopers, who, for aught she knew, might have been two of the riotous and savage brigands that were common in the Army of Africa. But the loyalty and the love shown in it had moved her; and to the woman whose life had been cloudless and cradled in ease from her birth, there was that in the suffering and the sacrifice which the anecdote suggested, that had at once the fascination of the unknown, and the pathos of a life so far removed from her, so little dreamed of by her, that all its coarser cruelty was hidden, while only its unutterable sadness and courage remained before her sight.

Had she, could she, ever have seen it in its realities, watched and read and understood it, she would have been too intensely revolted to have perceived the actual latent nobility possible in such an existence; as it was, she heard but of it in such words as alone could meet the ear of a great lady, she gazed at it only in pity from

a far distant height, and its terrible tragedy had solemnity and beauty for her.

When her servant approached her now with Cecil's message, she hesitated some few moments in surprise. She had not known that he was in her vicinity; the story she had heard had been simply of two unnamed Chasseurs d'Afrique, and he himself might have fallen on the field weeks before, for aught that she had heard of him. Some stray rumors of his defense of the encampment of Zaraila, and of the fine prowess shown in his last charge, alone had drifted to her. He was but a trooper; and he fought in Africa. The world had no concern with him, save the miniature world of his own regiment.

She hesitated some moments; then gave the required permission. "He has once been a gentleman: it would be cruel to wound him," thought the imperial beauty, who would have refused a prince or neglected a duke with chill indifference, but who was too generous to risk the semblance of humiliation to the man who could never approach her save upon such sufferance as was in itself mortification to one whose pride survived his fallen fortunes.

Moreover, the interest he had succeeded in awakening in her, the mingling of pity and of respect that his words and his bearing had aroused, was not extinct; had, indeed, only been strengthened by the vague stories that had of late floated to her of the day of Zaraila; of the day of smoke and steel and carnage, of war in its grandest yet its most frightful shape, of the darkness of death which the courage of human souls had power to illumine as the rays of the sun the tempest-cloud. Something more like quickened and pleasured expectation than any one among her many lovers had ever had power to rouse, moved her as she heard of the presence

of the man who, in that day, had saved the honor of his Flag. She came of a heroic race; she had heroic blood in her; and heroism, physical and moral, won her regard as no other quality could ever do. A man capable of daring greatly and of suffering silently was the only man who could ever hope to hold her thoughts.

The room was darkened from the piercing light without; and in its gloom, as he was ushered in, the scarlet of her cashmere and the gleam of her fair hair was all that, for the moment, he could see. He bowed very low that he might get his calmness back before he looked at her; and her voice in its lingering music came on his ear.

"You have found my chain, I think? I lost it in riding yesterday. I am greatly indebted to you for taking care of it."

She felt that she could only thank, as she would have thanked an equal who should have done her this sort of slight service, the man who had brought to her the gold pieces with which his Colonel had insulted him.

"It is I, madame, who am the debtor of so happy an accident."

His words were very low, and his voice shook a little over them; he was thinking not of the jeweled toy that he came here to restore, but of the inheritance that had passed away from him forever, and which, possessed, would have given him the title to seek what his own efforts could do to wake a look of tenderness in those proud eyes which men ever called so cold, but which he felt might still soften, and change, and grow dark with the thoughts and the passions of love, if the soul that gazed through them were but once stirred from its repose.

"Your chain is here, madame, though broken, I regret to see," he continued, as he took the little box

from his coat and handed it to her. She took it, and thanked him, without, for the moment, opening the enamel case as she motioned him to a seat at a little distance from her own.

"You have been in terrible scenes since I saw you last," she continued. "The story of Zaraila reached us. Surely they cannot refuse you the reward of your service now?"

"It will make little difference, madame, whether they do or not."

"Little difference! How is that?"

"To my own fate, I meant. Whether I be a captain or a corporal cannot alter——"

He paused; he dreaded lest the words should escape him which should reveal to her that which she would regard as such intolerable offense, such insolent indignity, when felt for her by a soldier in the grade he held.

"No? Yet such recognition is usually the ambition of every military life."

A very weary smile passed over his face.

"I have no ambition, madame. Or, if I have, it is not a pair of epaulettes that will content it."

She understood him; she comprehended the bitter mockery that the tawdry, meretricious rewards of regimental decoration seemed to the man who had waited to die at Zaraila as patiently and as grandly as the Old Guard at Waterloo.

"I understand! The rewards are pitifully disproportionate to the services in any army. Yet how magnificently you and your men, as I have been told, held your ground all through that fearful day!"

"We did our duty—nothing more."

"Well! is not that the rarest thing among men?"

"Not among soldiers, madame."

"Then you think that every trooper in a regiment is actuated by the finest and most impersonal sentiment that can actuate human beings!"

"I will not say that. Poor wretches! they are degraded enough, too often. But I believe that more or less in every good soldier, even when he is utterly unconscious of it, is an impersonal love for the honor of his Flag, an uncalculating instinct to do his best for the reputation of his corps. We are called human machines; we are so, since we move by no will of our own; but the lowest among us will at times be propelled by one single impulse—a desire to die greatly. It is all that is left to most of us to do."

She looked at him with that old look which he had seen once or twice before in her, of pity, respect, sympathy, and wonder, all in one. He spoke to her as he had never spoken to any living being. The grave, quiet, listless impassiveness that still was habitual with him—relic of the old habits of his former life—was very rarely broken, for his real nature or his real thoughts to be seen beneath it. But she, so far removed from him by position and by circumstance, and distant with him as a great lady could not but be with a soldier of whose antecedents and whose character she knew nothing, gave him sympathy, a sympathy that was sweet and rather felt than uttered; and it was like balm to a wound, like sweet melodies on a weary ear, to the man who had carried his secret so silently and so long, without one to know his burden or to soothe his pain.

"Yes," she said thoughtfully, while over the brilliancy of her face there passed a shadow. "There must be infinite nobility among these men, who live without hope—live only to die. That soldier, a day or two ago, who brought his dead comrade through the hurricane, risking his own death rather than leave the body to the

carrion-birds—you have heard of him? What tenderness, what greatness there must have been in that poor fellow's heart!"

"Oh, no! That was nothing."

"Nothing! They have told me he came every inch of the way in danger of the Arabs' shot and steel. He had suffered so much to bring the body safe across the plains, he fell down insensible on his entrance here."

"You set too much store on it. I owed him a debt far greater than any act like that could ever repay."

"*You*! Was it you?"

"Yes, madame. He who perished had a thousandfold more of such nobility as you have praised than I."

"Ah! Tell me of him," she said simply; but he saw that the lustrous eyes bent on him a grave, sweet sadness in them that was more precious and more pitiful than a million utterances of regret could ever have been.

Those belied her much who said that she was heartless; though grief had never touched her, she could feel keenly the grief of other lives. He obeyed her bidding now, and told her, in brief words, the story, which had a profound pathos spoken there, where without through the oval unglazed casement in the distance there was seen the tall dark leaning pine that overhung the grave of yesternight—the story over which his voice oftentimes fell with the hush of a cruel pain in it, and which he could have related to no other save herself. It had an intense melancholy and a strange beauty in its brevity and its simplicity, told in that gaunt, still, darkened chamber of the caravanserai, with the gray gloom of its stone walls around, and the rays of the golden sunlight from without straying in to touch the glistening hair of the proud head that bent forward to listen to the recital. Her face grew paler

as she heard; and a mist was over the radiance of her azure eyes; that death in the loneliness of the plains moved her deeply with the grand simplicity of its unconscious heroism. And, though he spoke little of himself, she felt, with all the divination of a woman's sympathies, how he who told her this thing had suffered by it—suffered far more than the comrade whom he had laid down in the grave where, far off in the noonday warmth, the young goats were at rest on the sod. When he ceased, there was a long silence; he had lost even the memory of her in the memory of the death that he had painted to her; and she was moved with that wondering pain, that emotion, half dread and half regret, with which the contemplation of calamities that have never touched, and that can never touch them, will move women far more callous, far more world-chilled than herself.

In the silence, her hands toyed listlessly with the enamel bonbonnière, whose silver had lost all its bright enameling, and was dinted and dulled till it looked no more than lead. The lid came off at her touch as she musingly moved it round and round; the chain and the ring fell into her lap; the lid remained in her hand, its interior unspoiled and studded in its center with one name in turquoise letters—VENETIA.

She started as the word caught her eye and broke her reverie; the color came warmer into her cheek; she looked closer and closer at the box, then, with a rapid movement, turned her head and gazed at her companion.

"How did you obtain this?"

"The chain, madame? It had fallen in the water."

"The chain! No! the box!"

He looked at her in surprise.

"It was given me very long ago."

"And by whom?"

"By a young child, madame."

Her lips parted slightly, the flush on her cheeks deepened; the beautiful face, which the Roman sculptor had said only wanted tenderness to make it perfect, changed, moved, was quickened with a thousand shadows of thought.

"The box is mine! I gave it! And you?"

He rose to his feet, and stood entranced before her, breathless and mute.

"And you?" she repeated.

He was silent still, gazing at her. He knew her now—how had he been so blind as never to guess the truth before, as never to know that those imperial eyes and that diadem of golden hair could belong alone but to the women of one race?

"And you?" she cried once more, while she stretched her hand out to him. "And you—you are Philip's friend? you are Bertie Cecil?"

Silently he bowed his head; not even for his brother's sake, or for sake of his pledged word, could he have lied to *her*.

But her outstretched hands he would not see, he would not take. The shadow of an imputed crime was stretched between them.

"Petite Reine!" he murmured. "Ah, God! how could I be so blind?"

She grew very pale as she sank back again upon the couch from which she had risen. It seemed to her as though a thousand years had drifted by since she had stood beside this man under the summer leaves of the Stephanien, and he had kissed her childish lips, and thanked her for her loving gift. And now—they had met thus!

He said nothing. He stood paralyzed, gazing at

her. There had been no added bitterness needed in the cup which he drank for his brother's sake, yet this bitterness surpassed all other: it seemed beyond his strengh to leave *her* in the belief that he was guilty. She in whom all fair and gracious things were met, she who was linked by her race to his past and his youth; she whose clear eyes in her childhood had looked upon him in that first hour of the agony that he had suffered then, and still suffered on, in the cause of a coward and an ingrate.

She was pale still; and her eyes were fixed on him with a gaze that recalled to him the look with which "Petite Reine" had promised that summer day to keep his secret, and tell none of that misery of which she had been witness.

"They thought that you were dead," she said at length, while her voice sank very low. "Why have you lived like this?"

He made no answer.

"It was cruel to Philip," she went on, while her voice still shook. "Child though I was, I remember his passion of grief when the news came that you had lost your life. He has never forgotten you. So often now he will still speak of you! He is in your camp. We are traveling together. He will be here this evening. What delight it will give him to know his dearest friend is living! But why—why—have you kept *him* ignorant, if you were lost to all the world beside?"

Still he answered her nothing. The truth he could not tell; the lie he would not. She paused, waiting reply. Receiving none, she spoke once more, her words full of that exquisite softness which was far more beautiful in her than in women less tranquil, less chill, and less negligent in ordinary moments.

"Mr. Cecil, I divined rightly! I knew that you

were far higher than your grade in Africa; I felt that in all things, save in some accident of position, we were equals. But why have you condemned yourself to this misery? Your life is brave, is noble, but it must be a constant torture to such as you. I remember well what you were—so well, that I wonder we have never recognized each other before now. The existence you lead in Algeria must be very terrible to you, though it is greater, in truth, than your old years of indolence!"

He sank down beside her on a low seat, and bowed his head on his hands for some moments. He knew that he must leave this woman whom he loved, and who knew him now as one whom in her childhood she had seen caressed and welcomed by all her race, to hold him guilty of this wretched, mean, and fraudulent thing, under whose charge he had quitted her country. Great dews of intense pain gathered on his forehead; his whole mind, and heart, and soul revolted against this brand of a guilt not his own that was stamped on him; he could have cried out to her the truth in all the eloquence of a breaking heart.

But he knew that his lips had been sealed by his own choice forever; and the old habits of his early life were strong upon him still. He lifted his head and spoke gently, and very quietly, though she caught the tremor that shook through the words:

"Do not let us speak of myself. You see what my life is; there is no more to be said. Tell me rather of your own story—you are no longer the Lady Venetia? You have been wedded and widowed, they say?"

"The wife of an hour—yes! But it is of yourself that I would hear. Why have left the world, and, above all, why have left *us*, to think you dead? I was not so young when we last saw you, but that I remember well how all my people loved you."

Had she been kept in ignorance of the accusation beneath which his flight had been made? He began to think so. It was possible. She had been so young a child when he had left for Africa; then the story was probably withheld from reaching her, and now, what memory had the world to give a man whose requiem it had said twelve long years before? In all likelihood she had never heard his name, save from her brother's lips, that had been silent on the shame of his old comrade.

"Leave my life alone, for God's sake!" he said, passionately. "Tell me of your own—tell me, above all, of *his*. He loved me, you say?—O Heaven! he did. Better than any creature that ever breathed; save the man whose grave lies yonder."

"He does so still," she answered, eagerly; "Philip's is not a heart that forgets. It is a heart of gold, and the name of his earliest friend is graven on it as deeply now as ever. He thinks you dead; to-night will be the happiest hour he has ever known when he shall meet you here."

He rose hastily, and moved to and fro across the narrow floor whose rugged earth had been covered with furs and rugs lest it should strike a chill to her as she passed over it: the torture grew unsupportable to him. And yet, it had so much of sweetness that he was powerless to end it—sweetness in the knowledge that she knew him now her equal, at least by birth; in the change that it had made in her voice and her glance, while the first grew tender with olden memories, and the last had the smile of friendship; in the closeness of the remembrances that seemed to draw and bind them together; in the swift sense that in an instant, by the utterance of a name, the barrier of caste which had been between them had fallen now and forever.

She watched him with grave musing eyes. She was moved, startled, softened to a profound pity for him, and filled with a wondering of regret; yet a strong emotion of relief, of pleasure, rose above these. She had never forgotten the man to whom, in her childish innocence, she had brought the gifts of her golden store; she was glad that he lived, though he lived thus; glad with a quicker, warmer, more vivid emotion than any that had ever occupied her for any man living or dead except her brother. The interest she had vaguely felt in a stranger's fortunes, and which she had driven contemptuously away as unworthy of her harboring, was justified for one whom her people had known and valued while she had been in her infancy, and of whom she had never heard from her brother's lips aught except constant regret and imperishable attachment. For it was true, as Cecil divined, that the dark cloud under which his memory had passed to all in England had never been seen by her eyes, from which, in childhood, it had been screened, and, in womanhood, withheld, because his name had been absolutely forgotten by all save the Seraph, to whom it had been fraught with too much pain for its utterance to be ever voluntary.

"What is it you fear from Philip?" she asked him, at last, when she had waited vainly for him to break the silence. "You can remember him but ill if you think that there will be anything in his heart save joy when he shall know that you are living. You little dream how dear your memory is to him——"

He paused before her abruptly.

"Hush, hush! or you will kill me! Why!—three nights ago I fled the camp as men flee pestilence, because I saw his face in the light of the bivouac-fire and dreaded that he should so see mine!"

She gazed at him in troubled amaze; there was that

in the passionate agitation of this man who had been serene through so much danger, and unmoved beneath so much disaster, that startled and bewildered her.

"You fled from Philip? Ah! how you must wrong him! What will it matter to him whether you be prince or trooper, wear a peer's robes or a soldier's uniform? His friendship never yet was given to externals. But—stay!—that reminds me of your inheritance. Do you know that Lord Royallieu is dead? that your younger brother bears the title, thinking you perished at Marseilles? He was here with me yesterday; he has come to Algeria for the autumn. Whatever your motive may have been to remain thus hidden from us all, you must claim your own rights now. You must go back to all that is so justly yours. Whatever your reason be to have borne with all the suffering and the indignity that have been your portion here, they will be ended now."

Her beauty had never struck him so intensely as at this moment, when, in urging him to the demand of his rights, she so unconsciously tempted him to betray his brother and to forsake his word. The indifference and the careless coldness that had to so many seemed impenetrable and unalterable in her were broken and had changed to the warmth of sympathy, of interest, of excitation. There was a world of feeling in her face, of eloquence in her eyes, as she stooped slightly forward with the rich glow of the cashmeres about her, and the sun-gleam falling across her brow. Pure, and proud, and noble in every thought, and pressing on him only what was the due of his birth and his heritage, she yet unwittingly tempted him with as deadly a power as though she were the vilest of her sex, seducing him downward to some infamous dishonor.

To do what she said would be but his actual right,

and would open to him a future so fair that his heart grew sick with longing for it; and yet to yield, and to claim justice for himself, was forbidden him as utterly as though it were some murderous guilt. He had promised never to sacrifice his brother; the promise held him like the fetters of a galley.

"Why do you not answer me?" she pursued, while she leaned near with wonder, and doubt, and a certain awakening dread shadowing the blue luster of her eyes that were bent so thoughtfully, so searchingly, upon him. "Is it possible that you have heard of your inheritance, of your title and estates, and that you voluntarily remain a soldier here? Lord Royallieu must yield them in the instant you prove your identity, and in that there could be no difficulty. I remember you well now, and Philip, I am certain, will only need to see you once to——"

"Hush, for pity's sake! Have you never heard—have none ever told you——"

"What?"

Her face grew paler with a vague sense of fear; she knew that he had been equable and resolute under the severest tests that could try the strength and the patience of man, and she knew, therefore, that no slender thing could agitate and could unman him thus.

"What is it I should have heard?" she asked him, as he kept his silence.

He turned from her so that she could not see his face.

"That, when I became dead to the world, I died with the taint of crime on me!"

"Of crime?"

An intense horror thrilled through the echo of the word; but she rose, and moved, and faced him with the fearless resolve of a woman whom no half-truth would blind, and no shadowy terror appall.

"Of crime? What crime?"

Then, and then only, he looked at her, a strange, fixed, hopeless, yet serene look, that she knew no criminal ever would or could have given.

"I was accused of having forged your brother's name."

A faint cry escaped her; her lips grew white, and her eyes darkened and dilated.

"Accused! But wrongfully?"

His breath came and went in quick sharp spasms.

"I could not prove that."

"Not prove it? Why?"

"I could not."

"But he—Philip—never believed you guilty?"

"I cannot tell. He may; he must."

"But you *are not!*"

It was not an interrogation, but an affirmation that rang out in the silver clearness of her voice. There was not a single intonation of doubt in it; there was rather a haughty authority that forbade even himself to say that one of his race and that one of his order could have been capable of such ignoble and craven sin.

His mouth quivered, a bitter sigh broke from him; he turned his eyes on her with a look that pierced her to the heart.

"Think me guilty or guiltless, as you will; I cannot answer you."

His last words were suffocated with the supreme anguish of their utterance. As she heard it, the generosity, the faith, the inherent justice, and the intrinsic sweetness that were latent in her beneath the negligence and the chillness of external semblance rose at once to reject the baser, to accept the nobler, belief offered to her choice. She had lived much in the world, but it had not corroded her; she had acquired keen discern-

ment from it, but she had preserved all the courageous and the chivalrous instincts of her superb nature. She looked at him now, and stretched her hands out toward him with a royal and gracious gesture of infinite eloquence.

"You are guiltless, whatever circumstance may have arrayed against you, whatever shadow of evil may have fallen falsely on you. Is it not so?"

He bowed his head low over her hands as he took them. In that moment half the bitterness of his doom passed from him; he had at least her faith. But his face was bloodless as that of a corpse, and the loud beatings of his heart were audible on the stillness. This faith must live on without one thing to show that he deserved it; if, in time to come, it should waver and fall, and leave him in the darkness of the foul suspicion under which he dwelt, what wonder would there be?

He lifted his head and looked her full in the eyes; her own closed involuntarily, and filled with tears. She felt that the despair and the patience of that look would haunt her until her dying day.

"I *was* guiltless; but none could credit it then; none would do so now; nor can I seek to make them. Ask me no more; give me your belief, if you can—God knows what precious mercy it is to me; but leave me to fulfill my fate, and tell no living creature what I have told you now."

The great tears stood in her eyes, and blinded her as she heard. Even in the amaze and the vagueness of this first knowledge of the cause of his exile she felt instinctively, as the Little One also had done, that some great sacrifice, some great fortitude and generosity, lay within this sealed secret of his sufferance of wrong. She knew, too, that it would be useless to seek

to learn that which he had chosen to conceal; that for no slender cause could he have come out to lead this life of whose sufferings she could gauge the measure; that nothing save some absolute and imperative reason could have driven him to accept such living death as was his doom in Africa.

"Tell no one!" she echoed. "What! not Philip even? not your oldest friend. Ah! be sure, whatever the evidence might be against you, his heart never condemned you for one instant."

"I believe it. Yet all you can do for me, all I implore you to do for me, is to keep silence forever on my name. To-day, accident has made me break a vow I never thought but to keep sacred. When you recognized me, I could not deny myself, I could not lie to you; but, for God's sake, tell none of what has passed between us!"

"But why?" she pursued—"why? You lie under this charge still—you cannot disprove it, you say; but why not come out before the world, and state to all what you swear now to me, and claim your right to bear your father's honors? If you were falsely accused, there must have been some guilty in your stead; and if——"

"Cease, for pity's sake! Forget I ever told you I was guiltless! Blot my memory out; think of me as dead, as I have been, till your eyes called me back to life. Think that I am branded with the theft of your brother's name; think that I am vile, and shameless, and fallen as the lowest wretch that pollutes this army; think of me as what you will, but *not* as innocent!"

The words broke out in a torrent from him, bearing down with them all his self-control, as the rush of waters bears away all barriers that have long dammed their course. They were wild, passionate, incoherent;

unlike any that had ever passed his lips, or been poured out in her presence. He felt mad with the struggle that tore him asunder, the longing to tell the truth to her, though he should never after look upon her face again, and the honor which bound silence on him for sake of the man whom he had sworn under no temptation to dispossess and to betray.

She heard him silently, with her grand meditative eyes, in which the slow tears still floated, fixed upon him. Most women would have thought that conscious guilt spoke in the violence of his self-accusation: she did not. Her intuition was too fine, her sympathies too true. She felt that he feared, not that she should unjustly think him guilty, but that she should justly think him guiltless. She knew that this, whatever its root might be, was the fear of the stainless, not of the criminal life.

"I hear you," she answered him, gently; "but I do not believe you, even against yourself. The man whom Philip loved and honored never sank to the base fraud of a thief."

Her glorious eyes were still on him as she spoke, seeming to read his very soul. Under that glance all the manhood, all the race, all the pride, and the love, and the courage within him refused to bear in her sight the shame of an alien crime, and rose in revolt to fling off the bondage that forced him to stand as a criminal before the noble gaze of this woman. His eyes met hers full, and rested on them without wavering; his head was raised, and his carriage had a fearless dignity.

"No. I was innocent. But in honor I must bear the yoke that I took on me long ago: in honor I can never give you or any living soul the *proof* that this crime was not mine. I thought that I should go to my grave without any ever hearing of the years that I have

passed in Africa, without any ever learning the name I used to bear. As it is, all I can ask is now—to be forgotten."

His voice fell before the last words, and faltered over them. It was bitter to ask only for oblivion from the woman whom he loved with all the strength of a sudden passion born in utter hopelessness; the woman whose smile, whose beauty, whose love might even possibly have been won as his own in the future, if he could have claimed his birthright. So bitter, that rather than have spoken those words of resignation he would have been led out by a platoon of his own soldiery and shot in the autumn sunlight beside Rake's grave.

"You ask what will not be mine to give," she answered him, while a great weariness stole through her own words, for she was bewildered, and pained, and oppressed with a new strange sense of helplessness before this man's nameless suffering. "Remember—I knew you so well in my earliest years, and you are so dear to the one dearest to me. It will not be possible to forget such a meeting as this. Silence, of course, you can command from me, if you insist on it; but——"

"I command nothing from you; but I implore it. It is the sole mercy you can show. Never, for God's sake! speak of me to your brother or to mine."

"Do you so mistrust Philip's affection?"

"No. It is because I trust it too entirely."

"Too entirely to do what?"

"To deal it fruitless pain. As you love him—as you pity me—pray that he and I never meet!"

"But why? if all this could be cleared——"

"It never can be."

The baffled sense of impotence against the granite

wall of some immovable calamity which she had felt before came on her. She had been always used to be obeyed, followed, and caressed; to see obstacles crumble, difficulties disappear, before her wish; she had not been tried by any sorrow, save when, a mere child still, she felt the pain of her father's death; she had been lapped in softest luxury, crowned with easiest victory. The sense that here there was a tragedy whose meaning she could not reach, that there was here a fate that she could not change or soften, brought a strange unfamiliar feeling of weakness before a hopeless and cruel doom that was no more to be altered by her will than the huge bare rocks of Africa out yonder in the glare of noon were to be lifted by her hand. For she knew that this man, who made so light of perils that would have chilled many to the soul in terror, and who bore so quiet and serene a habit beneath the sharpest stings and hardest blows of his adversities, would not speak thus without full warrant, would not consign himself to this renunciation of every hope, unless he were compelled to it by a destiny from which there was no escape.

She was silent some moments, her eyes resting on him with that grave and luminous regard which no man had ever charged to one more tender or less calmly contemplative. He had risen again, and paced to and fro the narrow chamber, his head bent down, his chest rising and falling with the labored, quickened breath. He had thought that the hour in which his brother's ingratitude had pierced his heart had been the greatest suffering he had ever known, or ever could know: but a greater had waited on him here in the fate to which the jeweled toy that he had lifted from the water had accidentally led him, not dreaming to what he came.

"Lord Royallieu," she said, softly, at length, while

she rose and moved toward him, the scarlet of the trailing cashmeres gathering dark ruby lights in them as they caught sun and shadow; and at the old name, uttered in her voice, he started, and turned, and looked at her as though he saw some ghost of his past life rise from its grave. "Why look at me so?" she pursued ere he could speak. "Act how you will, you cannot change the fact that you are the bearer of your father's title. So long as you live, your brother Berkeley can never take it legally. You may be a Chasseur of the African Army, but none the less are you a Peer of England."

"What matter that?" he muttered. "Why tell me that? I have said I am dead. Leave me buried here, and let him enjoy what he may—what he can."

"But this is folly—madness——"

"No; it is neither. I have told you I should stand as a felon in the eyes of the English law; I should have no civil rights; the greatest mercy fate can show me is to let me remain forgotten here. It will not be long, most likely, before I am thrust into the African sand, to rot like that brave soul out yonder. Berkeley will be the lawful holder of the title then; leave him in peace and possession now."

He spoke the words out to the end—calmly, and with unfaltering resolve. But she saw the great dews gather on his temples, where silver threads were just glistening among the bright richness of his hair, and she heard the short, low, convulsive breathing with which his chest heaved as he spoke. She stood close beside him, and gazed once more full in his eyes, while the sweet imperious cadence of her voice answered him:

"There is more than I know of here. Either you are the greatest madman, or the most generous man

that ever lived. You choose to guard your own secret; I will not seek to persuade it from you. But tell me one thing—*why* do you thus abjure your rights, permit a false charge to rest on you, and consign yourself forever to this cruel agony?"

His lips shook under his beard as he answered her:

"Because I can do no less in honor. For God's sake do not *you* tempt me!"

A quick deep sigh escaped her as she heard, her face grew very pale as it had done before, and she moved slightly from him.

"Forgive me," she said, after a long pause. "I will never ask you that again."

She could honor honor too well, and too well divine all that he suffered for its sake, ever to become his temptress in bidding him forsake it; yet, with a certain weariness, a certain dread, wholly unfamiliar to her, she realized that what he had chosen was the choice not of his present or of his future. It could have no concern for her—save that long years ago he had been the best-beloved friend of her best-beloved relative—whether or no he remained lost to all the world under the unknown name of a French Chasseur. And yet it smote her with a certain dull unanalyzed pain; it gave her a certain emotion of powerlessness and of hopelessness to realize that he would remain all his years through, until an Arab's shot should set him free, under this bondage of renunciation, beneath this yoke of service. She stood silent long, leaning against the oval of the casement, with the sun shed over the glowing cashmeres that swept round her. He stood apart in silence also. What could he say to her? His whole heart longed with an unutterable longing to tell her the truth, and bid her be his judge between him and his duty; but his promise hung on him like a leaden

weight. He must remain speechless;—and leave her, for doubt to assail her, and for scorn to follow it in her thoughts of him, if so they would.

Heavy as had been the curse to him of that one hour in which honor had forbade him to compromise a woman's reputation, and old tenderness had forbade him to betray a brother's sin, he had never paid so heavy a price for his act as that which he paid now.

Through the yellow sunlight without, over the barren dust-strewn plains, in the distance there approached three riders accompanied by a small escort of Spahis, with their crimson burnous floating in the autumnal wind. She started, and turned to him:

"It is Philip! He is coming for me from your camp to-day."

His eyes strained through the sun-glare:

"Ah, God! I cannot meet him—I have not strength. You do not know——"

"I know how well he loved you."

"Not better than I him! But I cannot—I dare not;—unless I could meet him as we never shall meet upon earth, we must be apart forever. For Heaven's sake promise me never to speak my name!"

"I promise until you release me."

"And you can believe me innocent still, in face of all?"

She stretched her hands to him once more: "I believe. For I know what you once were."

Great burning tears fell from his eyes upon her hands as he bent over them:

"God bless you! You were an angel of pity to me in your childhood; in your womanhood you give me the only mercy I have known since the last day you looked upon my face! We shall be far sundered forever;—may I come to you once more?"

She paused in hesitation and in thought awhile, while for the first time in all her years a tremulous tenderness passed over her face; she felt an unutterable pity for this man, and for his doom. Then she drew her hands gently away from him:

"Yes, I will see you again."

So much concession to such a prayer Venetia Corona had never before given. He could not command his voice to answer, but he bowed low before her as before an empress:—another moment, and she was alone.

She stood looking out at the wide level country beyond, with the glare of the white strong light and the red burnous of the Franco-Arabs glowing against the blue but cloudless sky, she thought that she must be dreaming some fantastic story born of these desert solitudes.

Yet her eyes were dim with tears, and her heart ached with another's woe. Doubt of him never came to her; but there was a vague, terrible pathos in the mystery of his fate that oppressed her with a weight of future evil, unknown, and unmeasured.

"Is he a madman?" she mused. "If not, he is a martyr;—one of the greatest that ever suffered unknown to other men."

* * * * * *

In the coolness of the late evening in the court of the caravanserai her brother and his friends lounged with her and the two ladies of their touring and sketching party, while they drank their sherbet, and talked of the Gérôme colors of the place, and watched the flame of the after-glow burn out, and threw millet to the doves and pigeons straying at their feet.

"My dear Venetia!" cried the Seraph, carelessly, tossing handfuls of grain to the eager birds, "I inquired for your Sculptor-Chasseur—that fellow Victor—but I

failed to see him, for he had been sent on an expedition shortly after I reached the camp. They tell me he is a fine soldier; but, by what the Marquis said, I fear he is but a handsome blackguard, and Africa, after all, may be his fittest place."

She gave a bend of her head to show she heard him, stroking the soft throat of a little dove that had settled on the bench beside her.

"There is a charming little creature there, a little fire-eater—Cigarette they call her—who is in love with him, I fancy. Such a picturesque child!—swears like a trooper, too," continued he who was now Duke of Lyonnesse. "By-the-way, is Berkeley gone?"

"Left yesterday."

"What for?—where to?"

"I was not interested to inquire."

"Ah! you never liked him! Odd enough to leave without reason or apology?"

"He had his reasons, doubtless."

"And made his apology to you?"

"Oh yes."

Her brother looked at her earnestly; there was a care upon her face new to him.

"Are you well, my darling?" he asked her. "Has the sun been too hot, or *la bise* too cold for you?"

She rose, and gathered her cashmeres about her, and smiled somewhat wearily her adieu to him.

"Both perhaps. I am tired. Good-night."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GIFT OF THE CROSS.

One of the most brilliant of Algerian autumnal days shone over the great camp in the south. The war was almost at an end for a time; the Arabs were defeated and driven desertwards; hostilities irksome, harassing, and annoying, like all guerrilla warfare, would long continue, but peace was virtually established, and Zaraila had been the chief glory that had been added by the campaign to the flag of Imperial France. The kites and the vultures had left the bare bones by thousands to bleach upon the sands, and the hillocks of brown earth rose in crowds where those, more cared for in death, had been hastily thrust beneath the brown crust of the earth. The dead had received their portion of reward —in the jackal's teeth, in the crow's beak, in the worm's caress. And the living received theirs in this glorious rose-flecked glittering autumn morning, when the breath of winter made the air crisp and cool, but the ardent noon still lighted with its furnace glow the hillside and the plain.

The whole of the Army of the South was drawn up on the immense level of the plateau to witness the presentation of the Cross of the Legion of Honor.

It was full noon. The sun shone without a single cloud on the deep sparkling azure of the skies. The troops stretched east and west, north and south, formed up in three sides of one vast massive square. The battalions of Zouaves and of Zephyrs; the brigade of Cha-seurs d'Afrique; the squadrons of Spahis; the

regiments of Tirailleurs and Turcos; the batteries of Flying Artillery, were all massed there, reassembled from the various camps and stations of the southern provinces to do honor to the day:—to do honor in especial to one by whom the glory of the Tricolor had been saved unstained.

The red white and blue of the standards, the brass of the eagle guidons, the gray tossed manes of the chargers, the fierce swarthy faces of the soldiery, the scarlet of the Spahis' cloaks, and the snowy folds of the Demi-Cavalerie turbans, the shine of the sloped lances, and the glisten of the carbine barrels, fused together in one sea of blended color, flashed into a million of prismatic hues against the somber bister shadow of the sunburnt plains and the clear blue of the skies.

It had been a sanguinary, fruitless, cruel campaign; it had availed nothing except to drive the Arabs away from some hundred leagues of useless and profitless soil; hundreds of French soldiers had fallen by disease, and drought, and dysentery, as well as by shot and saber, and were unrecorded save on the books of the bureaus, unlamented save, perhaps, in some little nestling hamlet among the great green woods of Normandy, or some wooden hut among the olives and the vines of Provence, where some woman toiling till sunset among the fields, or praying before some wayside saint's stone niche, would give a thought to the far-off and devouring desert that had drawn down beneath its sands the head that used to lie upon her bosom, cradled as a child's, or caressed as a lover's.

But the drums rolled out their long deep thunder over the wastes; and the shot-torn standards fluttered gayly in the breeze blowing from the west; and the clear full music of the French bands echoed away to the dim distant terrible south, where the desert-scorch and the

desert-thirst had murdered their bravest and best—and the Army was *en fête*. *En fête*, for it did honor to its darling. Cigarette received the Cross.

Mounted on her own little bright bay, Etoile-Filante, with tricolor ribbons flying from his bridle and among the glossy fringes of his mane, the Little One rode among her Spahis. A scarlet képi was set on her thick silken curls, a tricolor sash was knotted round her waist, her wine-barrel was slung on her left hip, her pistols thrust in her *ceinturon*, and a light carbine held in her hand with the butt-end resting on her foot. With the sun on her childlike brunette face, her eyes flashing like brown diamonds in the light, and her marvelous horsemanship, showing its skill in a hundred désinvoltures and daring tricks, the little Friend of the Flag had come hither among her half-savage warriors, whose red robes surrounded her like a sea of blood.

And on a sea of blood she, the Child of War, had floated, never sinking in that awful flood, but buoyant ever above its darkest waves, catching ever some ray of sunlight upon her fair young head, and being oftentimes like a star of hope to those over whom its dreaded waters closed. Therefore they loved her, these grim, slaughterous, and lustful warriors, to whom no other thing of womanhood was sacred, by whom in their wrath or their crime no friend and no brother was spared, whose law was license, and whose mercy was murder. They loved her, these brutes whose greed was like the tiger's, whose hate was like the devouring flame; and any who should have harmed a single lock of her curling hair would have had the spears of the African Mussulmans buried by the score in his body. They loved her, with the one fond triumphant love these vultures of the army ever knew; and to-day they gloried in her with fierce passionate delight. To-day

she was to her wild wolves of Africa what Jeanne of Vaucouleurs was to her brethren of France. And to-day was the crown of her young life. It is given to most, if the desire of their soul ever become theirs, to possess it only when long and weary and fainting toil has brought them to its goal; when beholding the golden fruit so far off, through so dreary a pilgrimage, dulls its bloom as they approach; when having so long centered all their thoughts and hopes in the denied possession of that one fair thing, they find but little beauty in it when that possession is granted to satiate their love. But thrice happy, and few as happy, are they to whom the dream of their youth is fulfilled *in* their youth, to whom their ambition comes in full sweet fruitage, while yet the colors of glory have not faded to the young, eager, longing eyes that watch its advent. And of these was Cigarette.

In the fair, slight girlish body of the child soldier there lived a courage as daring as Danton's, a patriotism as pure as Vergniaud's, a soul as aspiring as Napoléon's. Untaught, untutored, uninspired by poet's words or patriot's bidding, spontaneous as the rising and the blossoming of some wind-sown, sun-fed flower, there was, in this child of the battle and the razzia, the spirit of genius, the desire to live and to die greatly. It was unreasoned on, it was felt not thought, it was often drowned in the gayety of young laughter and the ribaldry of military jest, it was often obscured by noxious influence and stifled beneath the fumes of lawless pleasure; but there, ever, in the soul and the heart of Cigarette, dwelt the germ of a pure ambition—the ambition to do some noble thing for France, and leave her name upon her soldiers' lips, a watchword and a rallying-cry for evermore. To be forever a beloved tradition in the army of her country, to have her name

remembered in the roll-call as "*Mort sur le champ d'honneur*:" to be once shrined in the love and honor of France, Cigarette—full of the boundless joys of life that knew no weakness and no pain, strong as the young goat, happy as the young lamb, careless as the young flower tossing on the summer breeze—Cigarette would have died contentedly. And now, living, some measure of this desire had been fulfilled to her, some breath of this imperishable glory had passed over her. France had heard the story of Zaraila; from the Throne a message had been passed to her; what was far beyond all else to her, her own Army of Africa had crowned her, and thanked her, and adored her as with one voice, and wheresoever she passed the wild cheers rang through the roar of musketry, as through the silence of sunny air, and throughout the regiments every sword would have sprung from its scabbard in her defense if she had but lifted her hand and said one word—"Zaraila!"

The Army looked on her with delight now. In all that mute, still, inmovable mass that stretched out so far, in such gorgeous array, there was not one man whose eyes did not turn on her, whose pride did not center in her—their Little One, who was so wholly theirs, and who had been under the shadow of their Flag ever since the curls, so dark now, had been yellow as wheat in her infancy. The Flag had been her shelter, her guardian, her plaything, her idol; the flutter of the striped folds had been the first thing at which her childish eyes had laughed; the preservation of its colors from the sacrilege of an enemy's touch had been her religion, a religion whose true following was, in her sight, salvation of the worst and the most worthless life; and that Flag she had saved, and borne aloft in victory at Zaraila. There was not one in all those

hosts whose eyes did not turn on her with gratitude, and reverence, and delight in her as their own.

Not one: except where her own keen, rapid glance, far-seeing as the hawk's, lighted on the squadrons of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, and found among their ranks one face, grave, weary, meditative, with a gaze that seemed looking far away from the glittering scene to a grave that lay unseen leagues beyond, behind the rocky ridge.

"He is thinking of the dead man, not of me," thought Cigarette; and the first taint of bitterness entered into her cup of joy and triumph, as such bitterness enters into most cups that are drunk by human lips. A whole army was thinking of her, and of her alone; and there was a void in her heart, a thorn in her crown, because one among that mighty mass—one only—gave her presence little heed, but thought rather of a lonely tomb among the desolation of the plains.

But she had scarce time even for that flash of pain to quiver in impotent impatience through her. The trumpets sounded, the salvoes of artillery pealed out, the lances and the swords were carried up in salute; on to the ground rode the Marshal of France, who represented the imperial will and presence, surrounded by his staff, by generals of division and brigade, by officers of rank, and by some few civilian riders. An aid galloped up to her where she stood with the corps of her Spahis, and gave her his orders. The Little One nodded carelessly, and touched Etoile-Filante with the prick of the spur. Like lightning the animal bounded forth from the ranks, rearing and plunging, and swerving from side to side, while his rider, with exquisite grace and address, kept her seat like the little semi-Arab that she was, and with a thousand curves and bounds cantered down the line of the gathered troops, with the west wind blowing from the far-distant sea,

and fanning her bright cheeks till they wore the soft scarlet flush of the glowing japonica flower. And all down the ranks a low, hoarse, strange, longing murmur went—the buzz of the voices which, but that discipline suppressed them, would have broken out in worshiping acclamations.

As carelessly as though she reined up before the Café door of the *As de Pique*, she arrested her horse before the great Marshal who was the impersonation of authority, and put her hand up in the salute, with her saucy wayward laugh. He was the impersonation of that vast, silent, awful, irresponsible power which, under the name of the Second Empire, stretched its hand of iron across the sea, and forced the soldiers of France down into nameless graves, with the desert sand choking their mouths; but he was no more to Cigarette than any drummer-boy that might be present. She had all the contempt for the laws of rank of your thorough inborn democrat, all the gay insouciant indifference to station of the really free and untrammeled nature; and, in her sight, a dying soldier, lying quietly in a ditch to perish of shot-wounds without a word or a moan, was greater than all Messieurs les Maréchaux glittering in their stars and orders. As for impressing her, or hoping to impress her, with rank—pooh! You might as well have bid the sailing clouds pause in their floating passage because they came between royalty and the sun. All the sovereigns of Europe would have awed Cigarette not one whit more than a gathering of muleteers. "Allied sovereigns—bah!" she would have said, "what did that mean in '15? A chorus of magpies chattering over one stricken eagle!"

So she reined up before the Marshal and his staff, and the few great personages whom Algeria could bring around them, as indifferently as she had many a time

reined up before a knot of grim Turcos, smoking under a barrack-gate. *He* was nothing to her: it was her army that crowned her. "The Generalissimo is the poppy-head, the men are the wheat; lay every ear of the wheat low, and of what use is the towering poppy that blazed so grand in the sun?" Cigarette would say with metaphorical unction, forgetful, like most allegorists, that her fable was one-sided and unjust in figure and deduction.

Nevertheless, despite her gay contempt for rank, her heart beat fast under its gold-laced jacket as she reined up Etoile and saluted. In that hot clear sun all the eyes of that immense host were fastened on her, and the hour of her longing desire was come at last. France had recognized that she had done greatly, and France, through the voice of this, its chief, spoke to her—France, her beloved, and her guiding-star, for whose sake the young brave soul within her would have dared and have endured all things. There was a group before her, large and brilliant, but at them Cigarette never looked; what she saw were the sunburnt faces of her "children," of men who, in the majority, were old enough to be her grandsires, who had been with her through so many darksome hours, and whose black and rugged features lightened and grew tender whenever they looked upon their Little One. For the moment she felt giddy with sweet fiery joy; they were here to behold her thanked in the name of France.

The Marshal, in advance of all his staff, doffed his plumed hat and bowed to his saddle-bow as he faced her. He knew her well by sight, this pretty child of his Army of Africa, who had, before then, suppressed mutiny like a veteran, and led the charge like a Murat —this kitten with a lion's heart, this humming-bird with an eagle's swoop.

"Mademoiselle," he commenced, while his voice, well skilled to such work, echoed to the farthest end of the long lines of troops, "I have the honor to discharge to-day the happiest duty of my life. In conveying to you the expression of the Emperor's approval of your noble conduct in the present campaign, I express the sentiments of the whole Army. Your action on the day of Zaraila was as brilliant in conception as it was great in execution; and the courage you displayed was only equaled by your patriotism. May the soldiers of many wars remember you and emulate you. In the name of France, I thank you. In the name of the Emperor, I bring to you the Cross of the Legion of Honor."

As the brief and soldierly words rolled down the ranks of the listening regiments, he stooped forward from his saddle and fastened the red ribbon on her breast; while from the whole gathered mass, watching, hearing, waiting breathlessly to give their tribute of applause to their darling also, a great shout rose as with one voice, strong, full, echoing over and over again across the plains in thunder that joined her name with the name of France and of Napoleon, and hurled it upward in fierce tumultuous idolatrous love to those cruel cloudless skies that shone above the dead. She was their child, their treasure, their idol, their young leader in war, their young angel in suffering; she was all their own, knowing with them one common mother —France. Honor to her was honor to them; they gloried with heart and soul in this bright young fearless life that had been among them ever since her infant feet had waded through the blood of slaughter-fields, and her infant lips had laughed to see the tricolor float in the sun above the smoke of battle.

And as she heard, her face became very pale, her

large eyes grew dim and very soft, her mirthful mouth trembled with the pain of a too intense joy. She lifted her head, and all the unutterable love she bore her country and her people thrilled through the music of her voice:

"*Français!—ce n'était rien!*"

That was all she said; in that one first word of their common nationality, she spoke alike to the Marshal of the Empire and to the conscript of the ranks. "Français!" that one title made them all equal in her sight; whoever claimed it was honored in her eyes, and was precious to her heart, and when she answered them that it was nothing, this thing which they glorified in her, she answered but what seemed the simple truth in her code. She would have thought it "nothing" to have perished by shot, or steel, or flame, in day-long torture for that one fair sake of France.

Vain in all else, and to all else wayward, here she was docile and submissive as the most patient child; here she deemed the greatest and the hardest thing that she could ever do far less than all that she would willingly have done. And as she looked upon the host whose thousand and ten thousand voices rang up to the noon-day sun in her homage, and in hers alone, a light like a glory beamed upon her face that for once was white and still and very grave;—none who saw her face then, ever forgot that look.

In that moment she touched the full sweetness of a proud and pure ambition, attained and possessed in all its intensity, in all its perfect splendor. In that moment she knew that divine hour which, born of a people's love and of the impossible desires of genius in its youth, comes to so few human lives—knew that which was known to the young Napoleon when, in the hot hush of the nights of July, France welcomed the Conqueror

of Italy. And in that moment there was an intense stillness; the Army crowned as its bravest and its best a woman child in the spring-time of her girlhood.

Then Cigarette laid her hand on the Cross that had been the dream of her years since she had first seen the brazen glisten of the eagles above her wondering eyes of infancy, and loosened it from above her heart, and stretched her hand out with it to the great Chief.

"Monsieur le Maréchal, this is not for me."

"Not for you! The Emperor bestows it——"

Cigarette saluted with her left hand, still stretching to him the decoration with the other.

"It is not for me—not while I wear it unjustly."

"Unjustly! What is your meaning? My child, you talk strangely. The gifts of the Empire are not given lightly."

"No; and they shall not be given unfairly. Listen." The color had flushed back, bright and radiant, to her cheeks; her eyes glanced with their old daring; her contemptuous, careless eloquence returned, and her voice echoed, every note distinct as the notes of a trumpet call, down the ranks of the listening soldiery. "Hark you! The Emperor sends me this Cross; France thanks me; the Army applauds me. Well, I thank them, one and all. Cigarette was never yet ungrateful; it is the sin of the coward. But I say I will not take what is unjustly mine, and this preference to me is unjust. I saved the day at Zaraila?—oh-hé! *grande chose ça!* And how?—by scampering fast on my mare, and asking for a squadron or two of my Spahis—that was all. If I had not done so much—I, a soldier of Africa—why, I should have deserved to have been shot like a cat—bah!—should I not? It was not I who saved the battle. Who was it? It was a Chasseur d'Afrique, I tell you. What did he do? Why, this.

When his officers were all gone down, he rallied and gathered his handful of men, and held the ground with them all through the day—two—four—six—eight—ten hours in the scorch of the sun. The Arbicos, even, were forced to see that was grand; they offered him life if he would yield. All his answer was to form his few horsemen into line as well as he could for the slain, and charge—a last charge in which he knew not one of his troop could live through the swarms of the Arbis round them. That I saw with my own eyes. I and my Spahis just reached him in time. Then who is it that saved the day, I pray you?—I, who just ran a race for fun and came in at the fag-end of the thing, or this man who lived the whole day through in the carnage, and never let go of the guidon, but only thought how to die greatly? I tell you, the Cross is his, and not mine. Take it back, and give it where it is due."

The Marshal listened, half amazed, half amused—half prepared to resent the insult to the Empire and to discipline, half disposed to award that submission to her caprice which all Algeria gave to Cigarette.

"Mademoiselle," he said, with a grave smile, "the honors of the Empire are not to be treated thus. But who is this man for whom you claim so much?"

"Who is he?" echoed Cigarette, with all her fiery disdain for authority ablaze once more like brandy in a flame. "Oh-hé! Napoléon Premier would not have left his Marshals to ask that! He is the finest soldier in Africa, if it be possible for one to be finer than another where all are so great. They know that; they pick him out for all the dangerous missions. But the Black Hawk hates him, and so France never hears the truth of all that he does. I tell you, if the Emperor had seen him, as I saw him on the field of Zaraila, his would have been the Cross, and not mine."

"You are generous, my Little One."

"No; I am just."

Her brave eyes glowed in the sun, her voice rang as clear as a bell. She raised her head proudly and glanced down the line of her army. She was just—that was the one virtue in Cigarette's creed without which you were poltroon, or liar, or both.

She alone knew what neglect, what indifference, what unintentional but none the less piercing insults she had to avenge; she alone knew of that pain with which she had heard the name of her patrician rival murmured in delirious slumber after Zaraila; she alone knew of that negligent caress of farewell with which her lips had been touched as lightly as his hand caressed a horse's neck or a bird's wing. But these did not weigh with her one instant to make her withhold the words that she deemed deserved; these did not balance against him one instant the pique and the pain of her own heart in opposition to the due of his courage and his fortitude.

Cigarette was rightly proud of her immunity from the weaknesses of her sex; she had neither meanness nor selfishness.

The Marshal listened gravely, the groups around him smilingly. If it had been any other than the Little One, it would have been very different; as it was, all France and all Algeria knew Cigarette.

"What may be the name of this man whom you praise so greatly, my pretty one?" he asked her.

"That I cannot tell, Monsieur le Maréchal. All I know is he calls himself here Louis Victor."

"Ah! I have heard much of him. A fine soldier, but——"

"A fine soldier without a 'but,'" interrupted Cigarette, with rebellious indifference to the rank of the great

man she corrected, "unless you add, 'but never done justice by his Chief.'"

As she spoke, her eyes for the first time glanced over the various personages who were mingled among the staff of the Marshal, his invited guests for the review upon the plains. The color burned more duskily in her cheek, her eyes glittered with hate; she could have bitten her little, frank, witty tongue through and through for having spoken the name of that Chasseur who was yonder, out of earshot, where the lance-heads of his squadrons glistened against the blue skies. She saw a face which, though seen but once before, she knew instantly again—the face of "Miladi." And she saw it change color, and lose its beautiful hue, and grow grave and troubled as the last words passed between herself and the French Marshal.

"Ah! can she *feel!*" wondered Cigarette, who, with a common error of such vehement young democrats as herself, always thought that hearts never ached in the Patrician Order, and thought so still when she saw the listless proud tranquillity return, not again to be altered, over the perfect features that she watched with so much violent instinctive hate. "Did she heed his name, or did she not? What are their faces in that Order? Only alabaster masks!" mused the child. And her heart sank, and bitterness mingled with her joy, and the soul that had a moment before been so full of all pure and noble emotion, all high and patriotic and idealic thought, was dulled and soiled and clogged with baser passions. So ever do unworthy things drag the loftier nature earthward.

She scarcely heard the Marshal's voice as it addressed her with a kindly indulgence, as to a valued soldier and a spoilt pet in one.

"Have no fear, Little One. Victor's claims are not

forgotten, though we may await our own time to investigate and reward them. No one ever served the Empire and remained unrewarded. For yourself, wear your Cross proudly. It glitters above not only the bravest but the most generous heart in the service."

None had ever won such warm words from the redoubted chief, whose speech was commonly rapid and stern as his conduct of war, and who usually recompensed his men for fine service rather with a barrel of brandy to season their rations than with speeches of military eulogium. But it failed to give delight to Cigarette. She felt resting upon her the calm gaze of those brilliant azure eyes; and she felt, as she had done once in her rhododendron shelter, as though she were some very worthless, rough, rude, untaught, and coarse little barbarian, who was, at best, but fit for a soldier's jest and a soldier's riot in the wild license of the barrack-room or the campaigning tent. It was only the eyes of this woman, whom he loved, which ever had power to awaken that humiliation, that impatience of herself, that consciousness of something lost and irrevocable, which moved her now.

Cigarette was proud with an intense pride of all her fiery liberty from every feminine trammel, of all her complete immunity from every scruple and every fastidiousness of her sex. But, for once, within sight of that noble and haughty beauty a poignant, cruel, wounding sense of utter inferiority, of utter debasement, possessed and weighed down her lawless and indomitable spirit. Some vague weary feeling that her youth was fair enough in the sight of men, but that her older years would be very dark, very terrible, came on her even in this hour of the supreme joy, the supreme triumph, of her life. Even her buoyant and cloudless nature did not escape that mortal doom which pursues

and poisons every ambition in the very instant of its full fruition.

The doubt, the pain, the self-mistrust were still upon her as she saluted once again and paced down the ranks of the assembled divisions; while every lance was carried, every sword lifted, every bayonet presented to the order, "*Portez vos armes!*" as she went; greeted as though she were an empress, for that cross which glittered on her heart, for that courage wherewith she had saved the Tricolor.

The great shouts rent the air; the clash of the lowered arms saluted her; the drums rolled out upon the air; the bands of the regiments of Africa broke into the fiery rapture of a war-march; the folds of the battle-torn flags were flung out wider and wider on the breeze. Gray-bearded men gazed on her with tears of delight upon their grizzled lashes, and young boys looked at her as the children of France once gazed upon Jeanne d'Arc, where Cigarette, with the red ribbon on her breast, rode slowly in the noonday light along the line of troops.

It was the paradise of which she had dreamed; it was the homage of the army she adored; it was one of those hours in which life is transfigured, exalted, sublimated into a divine glory by the pure love of a people; and yet in that instant, so long, so passionately desired, the doom of all genius was hers. There was the stealing pain of a weary unrest amid the sunlit and intoxicating joy of satisfied aspiration.

The eyes of Venetia Corona followed her with something of ineffable pity. "Poor little unsexed child!" she thought. "How pretty and how brave she is! and —how true to him!"

The Seraph, beside her in the group around the flagstaff, smiled and turned to her.

"I said that little Amazon was in love with this fellow Victor; how loyally she stood up for him! But I dare say she would be as quick to send a bullet through him, if he should ever displease her."

"Why? Where there is so much courage there must be much nobility, even in the abandonment of such a life as hers."

"Ah, you do not know what half-French, half-African natures are. She would die for him just now very likely; but if he ever forsake her, she will be quite as likely to run her dirk through him."

"Forsake her! what is he to her?"

There was a certain impatience in the tone, and something of contemptuous disbelief, that made her brother look at her in wonder.

"What on earth can the loves of a camp concern *her?*" he thought, as he answered: "Nothing that I know of; but this charming little tigress is very fond of him. By-the-way, can you point the man out to me? I am curious to see him."

"Impossible! There are ten thousand faces, and the cavalry squadrons are so far off."

She spoke with indifference, but she grew a little pale as she did so, and the eyes that had always met his so frankly, so proudly, were turned from him. He saw it, and it troubled him with a trouble the more perplexed that he could assign to himself no reason for it. That it could be caused by any interest felt for a Chasseur d'Afrique by the haughtiest lady in all Europe would have been too preposterous and too insulting a supposition for it ever to occur to him. And he did not dream the truth—the truth that it was her withholding, for the first time in all her life, any secret from him which caused her pain; that it was the fear lest he should learn that his lost friend was

living thus which haunted her with that unspoken anxiety.

They were traveling here with the avowed purpose of seeing the military operations of the south; she could not have prevented him from accepting the Marshal's invitation to the review of the African Army without exciting comment and interrogation; she was forced to let events take their own course, and shape themselves as they would; yet an apprehension, a dread, that she could hardly form into distinct shape, pursued her. It weighed on her with an infinite oppression—this story which she alone had had revealed to her, this life whose martyrdom she alone had seen, and whose secret even she could not divine. It affected her more powerfully, it grieved her more keenly, than she herself knew. It brought her close, for the only time in her experience, to a life absolutely without a hope, and one that accepted the despair of such a destiny with silent resignation; it moved her as nothing less, as nothing feebler or of more common type, could ever have found power to do. There were a simplicity and a greatness in the mute, unpretentious, almost unconscious heroism of this man, who, for the sheer sake of that which he deemed the need of "honor," accepted the desolation of his entire future, which attracted her as nothing else had ever done, which made her heart ache when she looked at the glitter of the Franco-Arab squadrons, where their sloped lances glistened in the sun, with a pang that she had never felt before. Moreover, as the untutored, half-barbaric, impulsive young heart of Cigarette had felt, so felt the high-bred, cultured, world-wise mind of Venetia Corona —that this man's exile was no shame, but some great sacrifice; a sacrifice whose bitterness smote her with its own suffering, whose mystery wearied her with its own

perplexity, as she gazed down the line of the regiments to where the shot-bruised Eagle of Zaraila gleamed above the squadrons of the Chasseurs d'Afrique.

He, in his place among those squadrons, knew her, though so far distant, and endured the deadliest trial of patience which had come to him while beneath the yoke of African discipline. To leave his place was to incur the heaviest punishment; yet he could almost have risked that sentence rather than wait there. Only seven days had gone by since he had been with her under the roof of the caravanserai; but it seemed to him as if these days had aged him more than all the twelve years that he had passed upon the Algerian soil.

He was glad that the enmity of his relentless chief had placed such shadow of evil report between his name and the rewards due to his service, that even the promised recognition of his brilliant actions at Zaraila and elsewhere was postponed awhile on the plea of investigation. He was thankful that the honors which the whole Army expected for him, and which the antagonism of Châteauroy would soon be powerless to avert any longer from their meet bestowal, did not force him to go up there in the scorching light of the noon, and take those honors as a soldier of France, under the eyes of the man he loved, of the woman he adored.

As it was, he sat motionless as a statue in his saddle, and never looked westward to where the tricolors of the flag-staff drooped above the head of Venetia Corona.

Thus, he never heard the gallant words spoken in his behalf by the loyal lips that he had not cared to caress. As she passed down the ranks, indeed, he saw and smiled on his little champion; but the smile had only

a weary kindness of recognition in it, and it wounded Cigarette more than though he had struck her through the breast with his lance.

The moment that he dreaded came; the troops broke up and marched past the representative of their empire, the cavalry at the head of the divisions. He passed among the rest; he raised his lance so that it hid his features as much as its slender shaft could do; the fair and noble face on which his glance flashed was very pale and very grave; the one beside her was sunny and frank, and unchanged by the years that had drifted by, and its azure eyes, so like her own, sweeping over the masses with all the swift, keen appreciation of a military glance, were so eagerly noting carriage, accouterment, harness, horses, that they never once fell upon the single soldier whose heart so unutterably longed for, even while it dreaded, his recognition.

Venetia gave a low, quick breath of mingled pain and relief as the last of the Chasseurs paced by. The Seraph started, and turned his head:

"My darling! Are you not well?"

"Perfectly!"

"You do not look so;—and you forgot now to point me out this special trooper. I forgot him too."

"He goes there—the tenth from here."

Her brother looked; it was too late:

"He is taller than the others. That is all I can see now that his back is turned. I will seek him out when——"

"Do no such thing!"

"And why? It was your own request that I inquired——"

"Think me changeable as you will. Do nothing to seek him, to inquire for him——"

"But *why?* A man who at Zaraila——"

"Never mind! Do not let it be said you notice a Chasseur d'Afrique at *my* instance."

The color flushed her face as she spoke; it was with the scorn, the hatred, of this shadow of an untruth with which she for the sole time in life soiled her lips. He, noting it, shook himself restlessly in his saddle. If he had not known her to be the noblest and the haughtiest of all the imperial women who had crowned his house with their beauty and their honor, he could have believed that some interest, degrading as disgrace, moved her toward this foreign trooper, and caused her altered wishes and her silence. As it was, so much insult to her as would have existed in the mere thought was impossible to him; yet it left him annoyed and vaguely disquieted.

The subject did not wholly fade from his mind throughout the entertainments that succeeded to the military inspection, in the great white tent glistening with gilded bees and brightened with tricolor standards which the ingenuity of the soldiers of the administration had reared as though by magic amid the barrenness of the country, and in which the skill of camp cooks served up a delicate banquet. The scene was very picturesque, and all the more so for the wide-spread changing panorama without of the canvas city of the camp. It was chiefly designed to pleasure the great lady who had come so far southward; all the resources which could be employed were exhausted to make the occasion memorable and worthy of the dignity of the guests whom the Viceroy of the Empire delighted to honor. Yet she, seated there on his right hand, where the rich skins and cashmeres and carpets were strewn on a dais, saw in reality little save a confused blending of hues, and metals, and orders, and weapons, and snowy beards, and olive faces, and French elegance and glitter fused

with the grave majesty of Arab pomp. For her thoughts were not with the scene around her, but with the soldier who was without in that teeming crowd of tents, who lived in poverty, and danger, and the hard slavery of unquestioning obedience, and asked only to be as one dead to all who had known and loved him in his youth. It was in vain that she repelled the memory; it usurped her, and would not be displaced.

Meantime, in another part of the camp, the heroine of Zaraila was feasted, not less distinctively, if more noisily and more familiarly, by the younger officers of the various regiments. La Cigarette, many a time before the reigning spirit of suppers and carouses, was banqueted with all the éclat that befitted that cross which sparkled on her blue and scarlet vest. High thronged on a pyramid of knapsacks, canteens, and rugs, toasted a thousand times in all brandies and red wines that the stores would yield, sung of in improvised odes that were chanted by voices which might have won European fame as tenor or as basso, caressed and sued with all the rapid, fiery, lightly-come and lightly-go love of the camp, with twice a hundred flashing, darkling eyes bent on her in the hot admiration that her vain coquette spirit found delight in, ruling as she would with jest, and caprice, and command, and bravado all these men who were terrible as tigers to their foes, the Little One reigned alone; and—like many who have reigned before her—found lead in her scepter, dross in her diadem, satiety in her kingdom.

When it was over, this banquet that was all in her honor, and that three months before would have been a paradise to her, she shook herself free of the scores of arms outstretched to keep her captive, and went out into the night alone. She did not know what she ailed, but she was restless, oppressed, weighed down with a

sense of dissatisfied weariness that had never before touched the joyous and elastic nature of the child of France.

And this, too, in the moment when the very sweetest and loftiest of her ambitions was attained! when her hand wandered to that decoration on her heart which had been ever in her sight what the crown of wild olive and the wreath of summer grasses were to the youths and to the victors of the old dead classic years! As she stood in solitude under the brilliancy of the stars, tears, unfamiliar and unbidden, rose in her eyes as they gazed over the hosts around her.

"How they live only for the slaughter! how they perish like the beasts of the field!" she thought. Upon her, as on the poet or the patriot who could translate and could utter the thought as she could not, there weighed the burden of that heart-sick consciousness of the vanity of the highest hope, the futility of the noblest effort, to bring light into the darkness of the suffering, toiling, blind throngs of human life.

"There is only one thing worth doing—to die greatly!" thought the aching heart of the child-soldier, unconsciously returning to the only end that the genius and the greatness of Greece could find as issue to the terrible jest, the mysterious despair, of all existence.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DESERT HAWK AND THE PARADISE-BIRD.

Some way distant, parted by a broad strip of unoccupied ground from the camp, were the grand marquees set aside for the Marshal and for his guests. They were twelve in number, gayly decorated as far as decoration could be obtained in the southern provinces of Algeria, and had, Arab-like, in front of each the standard of the Tricolor. Before one were two other standards also—the flags of England and of Spain. Cigarette, looking on from afar, saw the alien colors wave in the torchlight flickering on them. "That is *hers*," thought the Little One, with the mournful and noble emotions of the previous moments swiftly changing into the violent, reasonless, tumultuous hatred at once of a rival and of an Order.

Cigarette was a thorough democrat; when she was two years old she had sat on the topmost pile of a Parisian barricade, with the red bonnet on her curls, and had clapped her tiny hands for delight when the bullets flew, and the "Marseillaise" rose above the cannonading; and the spirit of the musketry and of the "Marseillaise" had together passed into her and made her what she was. She was a genuine democrat; and nothing short of the pure isonomy of the Greeks was tolerated in her political philosophy, though she could not have told what such a word had meant for her life. She had all the furious prejudices and all the instinctive truths in her of an uncompromising *Rouge;* and the sight alone of those lofty standards, signalizing the place of rest of the "aristocrats," while her "children's" lowly

tents wore in her sight all the dignity and all the distinction of the true field, would have aroused her ire at any time. But now a hate tenfold keener moved her; she had a jealousy of the one in whose honor those two foreign ensigns floated, that was the most bitter thing which had ever entered her short and sunny life—a hate the hotter because tinged with that sickening sense of self-humiliation, because mingled with that wondering emotion at beholding something so utterly unlike to all that she had known or dreamt.

She had it in her, could she have had the power, to mercilessly and brutally destroy this woman's beauty, which was so far above her reach, as she had once destroyed the ivory wreath; yet, as that of the snow-white carving had done, so did this fair and regal beauty touch her, even in the midst of her fury, with a certain reverent awe, with a certain dim sense of something her own life had missed. She had trodden the ivory in pieces with all the violence of childish, savage, uncalculating hate, and she had been chidden, as by a rebuking voice, by the wreck which her action had made at her feet: so could she now, had it been possible, have ruined and annihilated the loveliness that filled his heart and his soul; but so would she also, the moment her instinct to avenge herself had been sated, have felt the remorse and the shame of having struck down a delicate and gracious thing that even in its destruction had a glory that was above her.

Even her very hate attracted her to the sight, to the study, to the presence of this woman, who was as dissimilar to all of womanhood that had ever crossed her path, in camp and barrack, as the pure, white, gleaming lily of the hot-house is unlike the wind-tossed, sand-stained, yellow leaf down-trodden in the mud. An irresistible fascination drew her toward the self-same

pain which had so wounded her a few hours before—an impulse more intense than curiosity, and more vital than caprice, urged her to the vicinity of the only human being who had ever awakened in her the pangs of humiliation, the throbs of envy.

And she went to that vicinity, now that the daylight had just changed to evening, and the ruddy torch-glare was glowing everywhere from great pine boughs thrust in the ground, with their resinous branches steeped in oil and flaring alight. There was not a man that night in camp who would have dared oppose the steps of the young heroine of the Cross wherever they might choose, in their fantastic flight, to wander. The sentinels passing up and down the great space before the marquees challenged her, indeed, but she was quick to give the answering password, and they let her go by them, their eyes turning after the little picturesque form that every soldier of the Corps of Africa loved almost like the flag beneath which he fought. Once in the magic circle, she paused awhile, the desire that urged her on, and the hate that impelled her backward, keeping her rooted there in the dusky shadow which the flapping standards threw.

To creep covertly into her rival's presence, to hide herself like a spy to see what she wished, to show fear, or hesitation, or deference, were not in the least what she contemplated. What she intended was to confront this fair, strange, cold, cruel thing, and see if she were of flesh and blood like other living beings, and do the best that could be done to outrage, to scourge, to challenge, to deride her with all the insolent artillery of camp ribaldry, and show her how a child of the people could laugh at her rank, and affront her purity, and scorn her power. Definite idea there was none in her; she had come on impulse; but a vague longing in some

way to break down that proud serenity which galled her so sharply, and bring hot blood of shame into that delicate face, and cast indignity on that imperious and unassailable pride, consumed her.

She longed to do as some girl of whom she had once been told by an old Invalide had done in the '89—a girl of the people, a fisher-girl of the Cannébière, who had loved one above her rank, a noble who deserted her for a woman of his own order, a beautiful, soft-skinned, lily-like, scornful aristocrat, with the silver ring of merciless laughter and the languid luster of sweet contemptuous eyes. The Marseillaise bore her wrong in silence—she was a daughter of the south and of the populace, with a dark, brooding, burning beauty, strong and fierce, and braced with the salt lashing of the sea and with the keen breath of the stormy mistral. She held her peace while the great lady was wooed and won, while the marriage joys came with the purple vintage time, while the people were made drunk at the bridal of their châtelaine in those hot, ruddy, luscious autumn days.

She held her peace; and the Terror came, and the streets of the city by the sea ran blood, and the scorch of the sun blazed, every noon, on the scaffold. Then she had her vengeance. She stood and saw the axe fall down on the proud snow-white neck that never had bent till it bent there, and she drew the severed head into her own bronzed hands and smote the lips his lips had kissed, a cruel blow that blurred their beauty out, and twined a fish-hook in the long and glistening hair, and drew it, laughing as she went, through dust, and mire, and gore, and over the rough stones of the town, and through the shouting crowds of the multitudes, and tossed it out on to the sea, laughing still as the waves flung it out from billow to billow, and the fish sucked

it down to make their feast. "*Voilà tes secondes noces!*" she cried where she stood, and laughed by the side of the gray angry water, watching the tresses of the floating hair sink downward like a heap of sea-tossed weed.

That horrible story came to the memory of Cigarette now as it had been told her by the old soldier who, in his boyhood, had seen the entry of the Marseillais to Paris. She knew what the woman of the people had felt when she had bruised and mocked and thrown out to the devouring waters that fair and fallen head.

"I could do it—I could do it," she thought, with the savage instinct of her many-sided nature dominant, leaving uppermost only its ferocity—the same ferocity as had moved the southern woman to wreak her hatred on the senseless head of her rival. The school in which the child-soldier had been reared had been one to foster all those barbaric impulses, to leave in their inborn uncontrolled force all those native desires which the human shares with the animal nature. There had been no more to teach her that these were criminal or forbidden than there is to teach the young tigress that it is cruel to tear the antelope for food. What Cigarette was, that nature had made her; she was no more trained to self-control, or to the knowledge of good, than is the tiger's cub as it wantons in its play under the great broad tropic leaves.

Now, she acted on her impulse; her impulse of open scorn of rank, of reckless vindication of her right to do just whatsoever pleasured her; and she went boldly forward and dashed aside, with no gentle hand, the folds that hung before the entrance of the tent, and stood there with the gleam of the starry night and the glow of the torches behind her, so that her picturesque

and brightly-colored form looked painted on a dusky lurid background of shadow and of flame.

The action startled the occupants of the tent, and made them both look up; they were Venetia Corona and a Levantine woman, who was her favorite and most devoted attendant, and had been about her from her birth. The tent was the first of three set aside for her occupance, and had been adorned with as much luxury as was procurable, and with many of the rich and curious things of Algerian art and workmanship, so far as they could be hastily collected by the skill and quickness of the French intendance. Cigarette stood silently looking at the scene on which she had thus broken without leave or question; she saw nothing of it except one head lifted in surprise at her entrance—just such a head, just so proudly carried, just so crowned with gleaming hair as that which the Marseillaise had dragged through the dust of the streets and cast out to the greed of the sharks. Venetia hesitated a moment in astonished wonder; then, with the grace and the courtesy of her race, rose and approached the entrance of her tent, in which that figure, half a soldier, half a child, was standing, with the fitful reddened light behind. She recognized whose it was.

"Is it you, *ma petite?*" she said kindly. "Come within. Do not be afraid——"

She spoke with the gentle consideration of a great lady to one whom she admired for her heroism, compassionated for her position, and thought naturally in need of such encouragement. She had liked the frank, fearless, ardent brunette face of the Little Friend of the Flag; she had liked her fiery and indomitable defense of the soldier of Zaraila; she felt an interest in her as deep as her pity, and she was above the scruples which many women of her rank might have had as to

the fitness of entering into conversation with this child of the army. She was gentle to her as to a young bird, a young kitten, a young colt; what her brother had said of the vivandière's love for one whom the girl only knew as a trooper of Chasseurs filled with an indefinable compassion the woman who knew him as her own equal and of her own Order.

Cigarette, for once, answered nothing; her eyes very lowering, burning, savage.

"You wish to see me?" Venetia asked once more. "Come nearer. Have no fear——"

The one word unloosed the spell which had kept Cigarette speechless; the one word was an insult beyond endurance, that lashed all the worst spirit in her into flame.

"Fear!" she cried, with a camp oath, whose blasphemy was happily unintelligible to her listener. "Fear! You think *I* fear *you!*—the darling of the army, who saved the squadron at Zaraila, who has seen a thousand days of bloodshed, who has killed as many men with her own hand as any Lascar among them all —fear *you*, you hot-house flower, you paradise-bird, you silver pheasant, who never did aught but spread your dainty colors in the sun, and never earned so much as the right to eat a piece of black bread, if you had your deserts! Fear *you*——I! Why! Do you not know that I could kill you where you stand as easily as I could wring the neck of any one of those gold winged orioles that flew above your head to-day, and who have more right to live than you, for they do at least labor in their own fashion for their food, and their drink, and their dwelling? Dieu de Dieu! Why, I have killed Arabs, I tell you—great gaunt, grim men—and made them bite the dust under my fire. Do you think I would check for a moment at dealing *you* death, you

beautiful, useless, honeyed, poisoned, painted exotic, that has every wind tempered to you, and thinks the world only made to bear the fall of your foot!"

The fury of words was poured out without pause, and with an intense passion vibrating through them; the wine was hot in her veins, the hate was hot in her heart; her eyes glittered with murderous meaning, and she darted with one swift bound to the side of the rival she loathed, with the pistol half out of her belt; she expected to see the one she threatened recoil, quail, hear the threat in terror; she mistook the nature with which she dealt. Venetia Corona never moved, never gave a sign of the amazement that awoke in her; but she put her hand out and clasped the barrel of the weapon, while her eyes looked down into the flashing, looming, ferocious ones that menaced her, with calm contemptuous rebuke, in which something of infinite pity was mingled.

"Child, are you mad?" she said gravely. "Brave natures do not stoop to assassination, which you seem to deify. If you have any reason to feel evil against me, tell me what it is; I always repair a wrong if I can. But as for those threats, they are most absurd if you do not mean them, they are most wicked if you do."

The tranquil, unmoved, serious words stilled the vehement passion she rebuked with a strange and irresistible power; under her gaze the savage lust in Cigarette's eyes died out, and their lids drooped over them; the dusky scarlet color faded from her cheeks; for the first time in her life she felt humiliated, vanquished, awed. If this "aristocrat" had shown one sign of fear, one trace of apprehension, all her violent and reckless hatred would have reigned on, and, it might have been, have rushed from threat to execution; but showing the only quality, that of courage, for which

she had respect, her great rival confused and disarmed her. She was only sensible, with a vivid, agonizing sense of shame, that her only cause of hatred against this woman was that he loved her. And this she would have died a thousand deaths rather than have acknowledged.

She let the pistol pass into Venetia's grasp; and stood, irresolute and ashamed, her fluent tongue stricken dumb, her intent to wound, and sting, and outrage with every vile coarse jest she knew, rendered impossible to execute. The purity and the dignity of her opponent's presence had their irresistible influence, an influence too strong for even her débonnair and dangerous insolence. She hated herself in that moment more than she hated her rival.

Venetia laid the loaded pistol down, away from both, and seated herself on the cushions from which she had risen. Then she looked once more long and quietly at her unknown antagonist.

"Well?" she said, at length. "Why do you venture to come here? And why do you feel this malignity toward a stranger who never saw you until this morning?"

Under the challenge the fiery spirit of Cigarette rallied, though a rare and galling sense of intense inferiority, of intense mortification, was upon her; though she would almost have given the Cross which was on her breast that she had never come into this woman's sight.

"Oh-hé!" she answered, recklessly, with the red blood flushing her face again at the only evasion of truth of which the little desperado, with all her sins, had ever been guilty. "I hate you, Miladi, because of your Order—because of your nation—because of your fine dainty ways—because of your aristocrat's in-

solence—because you treat my soldiers like paupers—because you are one of those who do no more to have the right to live than the purple butterfly that flies in the sun, and who oust the people out of their dues as the cuckoo kicks the poor birds that have reared it, out of the nest of down, to which it never has carried a twig or a moss!"

Her listener heard with a slight smile of amusement and of surprise that bitterly discomfited the speaker. To Venetia Corona the girl-soldier seemed mad; but it was a madness that interested her, and she knew at a glance that this child of the army was of no common nature and no common mind.

"I do not wish to discuss democracy with you," she answered, with a tone that sounded strangely tranquil to Cigarette after the scathing acrimony of her own. "I should probably convince you as little as you would convince me; and I never waste words. But I heard you to-day claim a certain virtue—justice. How do you reconcile with that your very hasty condemnation of a stranger of whose motives, actions, and modes of life it is impossible you can have any accurate knowledge?"

Cigarette once again was silenced; her face burned, her heart was hot with rage. She had come prepared to upbraid and to outrage this patrician with every jibe and grossness camp usage could supply her with, and—she stood dumb before her! She could only feel an all-absorbing sense of being ridiculous, and contemptible, and puerile in her sight.

"You bring two charges against me," said Venetia, when she had vainly awaited answer. "That I treat your comrades like paupers, and that I rob the people—my own people I imagine you to mean—of their dues. In the first, how will you prove it?—in the second, how can you know it?"

"Pardieu, Miladi!" swore Cigarette, recklessly, seeking only to hold her own against the new sense of inferiority and of inability that oppressed her. "I was in the hospital when your fruits and your wines came; and as for your people, I don't speak of them—they are all slaves, they say, in Albion, and will bear to be yoked like oxen if they think they can turn any gold in the furrows!—I speak of *the* people. Of the toiling, weary, agonized, joyless, hapless multitudes who labor on, and on, and on, ever in darkness, that such as you may bask in sunlight and take your pleasures wrung out of the death-sweat of millions of work-murdered poor! What right have you to have your path strewn with roses, and every pain spared from you; to only lift your voice and say, 'Let that be done,' to see it done?—to find life one long sweet summer day of gladness and abundance, while they die out in agony by thousands, ague-stricken, famine-stricken, crime-stricken, age-stricken, for want only of one ray of the light of happiness that falls from dawn to dawn like gold upon *your* head?"

Vehement and exaggerated as the upbraiding was, her hearer's face grew very grave, very thoughtful, as she spoke: those luminous earnest eyes, whose power even the young democrat felt, gazed wearily down into hers.

"Ah, child! do you think *we* never think of that? You wrong me—you wrong my Order. There are many besides myself who turn over that terrible problem as despairingly as you can ever do. As far as in us lies, we strive to remedy its evil; the uttermost effort can do but little, but that little is only lessened—fearfully lessened—whenever Class is arrayed against Class by that blind antagonism which animates yourself."

Cigarette's intelligence was too rapid not to grasp the truths conveyed by these words; but she was in no mood to acknowledge them.

"Nom de Dieu, Miladi!" she swore in her teeth. "If you do turn over the problem—you aristocrats—it is pretty work, no doubt! just putting the bits of a puzzle ball together so long as the game pleases you, and leaving the puzzle in chaos when you are tired! Oh-hé! I know how fine ladies and fine gentlemen play at philanthropies! But I am a child of the People, mark you; and I only see how birth is an angel that gives such as you eternal sunlight and eternal summer, and how birth is a devil that drives down the millions into a pit of darkness, of crime, of ignorance, of misery, of suffering, where they are condemned before they have opened their eyes to existence, where they are sentenced before they have left their mothers' bosoms in infancy. You do not know what that darkness is. It is night—it is ice—it is hell!"

Venetia Corona sighed wearily as she heard; pain had been so far from her own life, and there was an intense eloquence in the low deep words that seemed to thrill through the stillness.

"Nor do you know how many shadows checker that light which you envy! But I have said; it is useless for me to argue these questions with you. You commence with a hatred of a class; all justice is over wherever that element enters. If I were what you think, I should bid you leave my presence, which you have entered so rudely. I do not desire to do that. I am sure that the heroine of Zaraila has something nobler in her than mere malignity against a person who can never have injured her; and I would endure her insolence for the sake of awakening her justice. A virtue, that was so great in her at noon, cannot be utterly dead at nightfall?"

Cigarette's fearless eyes drooped under the gaze of those bent so searchingly, yet so gently, upon her; but

only for a moment: she raised them afresh with their old dauntless frankness.

"Dieu! you shall never say you wanted justice and truth from a French soldier, and failed to get them! I hate you, never mind why:—I *do*, though you never harmed me. I came here for two reasons: one, because I wanted to look at you close—you are not like anything that I ever saw; the other, because I wanted to wound you, to hurt you, to outrage you, if I could find a way how. And you will not let me do it. I do not know what it is in you."

In all her courted life, the great lady had had no truer homage than lay in that irate reluctant wonder of this fiery foe.

She smiled slightly.

"My poor child, it is rather something in yourself—a native nobility that will not allow you to be as unjust and as insolent as your soul desires——"

Cigarette gave a movement of intolerable impatience:

"Pardieu! do not pity *me*, or I shall give you a taste of my 'insolence' in earnest! You may be a sovereign *grande dame* everywhere else, but you can carry no terror with you for me, I promise you!"

"I do not seek to do so. If I did not feel interest in you, do you suppose I should suffer for a moment the ignorant rudeness of an ill-bred child? You fail in the tact, as in the courtesy, that belong to your nation."

The rebuke was gentle, but it was all the more severe for its very serenity. It cut Cigarette to the quick; it covered her with an overwhelming sense of mortification and of failure. She was too keen and too just, despite all her vanity, not to feel that she deserved the condemnation, and not to know that her opponent had all the advantage and all the justice on her side. She had done nothing by coming here; nothing except to appear as

an insolent and wayward child before her superb rival, and to feel a very anguish of inferiority before the grace, the calm, the beauty, the nameless potent charm of this woman, whom she had intended to humiliate and injure!

The inborn truth within her, the native generosity and candor that soon or late always overruled every other element in the Little One, conquered her now. She dashed down her Cross on the ground and trod passionately on the decoration she adored:

"I disgrace it the first day I wear it! You are right, though I hate you, and you are as beautiful as a sorceress! There is no wonder he loves you!"

"He! Who?"

There was a colder and more utterly amazed hauteur in the interrogation than had come into her voice throughout the interview, yet on her fair face a faint warmth rose.

The words were out, and Cigarette was reckless what she said; almost unconscious, indeed, in the violence of the many emotions in her.

"The man who carves the toys you give your dog to break!" she answered bitterly. "Dieu de Dieu! he loves you. When he was down with his wounds after Zaraila, he said so; but he never knew what he said, and he never knew that I heard him. You are like the women of his old world; though through you he got treated like a dog, he loves you!"

"Of whom do you venture to speak?"

The cold calm dignity of the question, whose very tone was a rebuke, came strangely after the violent audacity of Cigarette's speech.

"Sacre bleu! of him, I tell you, who was made to bring his wares to you like a hawker. And you think it insult, I will warrant?—insult for a soldier who has

nothing but his courage, and his endurance, and his heroism under suffering to ennoble him, to dare to love Madame la Princesse Corona! I think otherwise. I think that Madame la Princesse Corona never had a love of so much honor, though she has had princes and nobles and all the men of her rank, no doubt, at her feet, through that beauty that is like a spell!"

Hurried headlong by her own vehemence, and her own hatred for her rival which drove her to magnify the worth of the passion of which she was so jealous, that she might lessen, if she could, the pride of her on whom it was lavished, she never paused to care what she said, or heed what its consequences might become. She felt incensed, amazed, irritated, to see no trace of any emotion come on her hearer's face; the hot, impetuous, expansive, untrained nature underrated the power for self-command of the Order she so blindly hated.

"You speak idly and at random, like the child you are," the *grande dame* answered her with chill contemptuous rebuke. "I do not imagine that the person you allude to made you his confidante in such a matter?"

"He!" retorted Cigarette. "He belongs to your class, Miladi. He is as silent as the grave. You might kill him, and he would never show it hurt. I only know what he muttered in his fever."

"When you attended him?"

"Not I!" cried Cigarette, who saw for the first time that she was betraying herself. "He lay in the scullion's tent where I was; that was all; and he was delirious with the shot-wounds. Men often are——"

"Wait! Hear me a little while, before you rush on in this headlong and foolish speech," interrupted her auditor, who had in a moment's rapid thought decided on her course with this strange wayward nature. "You

err in the construction you have placed on the words, whatever they were, which you heard. The gentleman —he is a gentleman—whom you speak of bears me no love. We are almost strangers. But, by a strange chain of circumstances he is connected with my family; he once had great friendship with my brother; for reasons that I do not know, but which are imperative with him, he desires to keep his identity unsuspected by every one; an accident alone revealed it to me, and I have promised him not to divulge it. You understand?"

Cigarette gave an affirmative gesture. Her eyes were fastened suddenly, yet with a deep bright glow in them, upon her companion; she was beginning to see her way through his secret—a secret she was too intrinsically loyal even now to dream of betraying.

"You spoke very nobly for him to-day. You have the fealty of one brave character to another, I am sure?" pursued Venetia Corona, purposely avoiding all hints of any warmer feeling on her listener's part, since she saw how tenacious the girl was of any confession of it. "You would do him service if you could, I fancy; am I right?"

"Oh yes!" answered Cigarette, with an over-assumption of carelessness. "He is *bon-zig;* we always help each other. Besides, he is very good to my men. What is it you want of me?"

"To preserve secrecy on what I have told you for his sake; and to give him a message from me."

Cigarette laughed scornfully; she was furious with herself for standing obediently like a chidden child to hear this patrician's bidding, and to do her will. And yet, try how she would, she could not shake off the spell under which those grave, sweet, lustrous eyes of command held her.

"Pardieu, Miladi! Do you think I babble like any young *bleu* drunk with his first measure of wine? As for your message, you had better let him come and hear what you have to say; I cannot promise to remember it!"

"Your answer is reckless; I want a serious one. You spoke like a brave and a just friend to him to-day; are you willing to act as such to-night? You have come here strangely, rudely, without pretext or apology; but I think better of you than you would allow me to do if I judged only from the surface. I believe that you have loyalty, as I know that you have courage."

Cigarette set her teeth hard.

"What of that? I have them *en militaire*, that is all."

"This of it. That one who has them will never cherish malice unjustifiably, or fail to fulfill a trust."

Cigarette's clear brown skin grew very red.

"That is true," she muttered, reluctantly. Her better nature was growing uppermost, though she strove hard to keep the evil one predominant.

"Then you will cease to feel hatred toward me for so senseless a reason as that I belong to an aristocracy that offends you; and you will remain silent on what I tell you concerning the one whom you know as Louis Victor?"

Cigarette nodded assent; the sullen fire-glow still burnt in her eyes, but she succumbed to the resistless influence which the serenity, the patience, and the dignity of this woman had over her. She was studying Venetia Corona all this while with the keen rapid perceptions of envy and of jealousy, studying her features, her form, her dress, her attitude, all the many various and intangible marks of birth and breeding which were

so new to her, and which made her rival seem so strange, so dazzling, so marvelous a sorceress to her; and all the while the sense of her own inferiority, her own worthlessness, her own boldness, her own debasement was growing upon her, eating, sharply as aqua fortis into brass, into the metal of her vanity and her pride, humiliating her unbearably, yet making her heart ache with a sad pathetic pity for herself.

"He *is* of your Order, then?" she asked, abruptly.

"He was—yes."

"Oh-hé!" cried Cigarette, with her old irony. "Then he must be always, mustn't he? You think too much of your blue blood, you patricians, to fancy it can lose its royalty, whether it run under a King's purple or a Roumi's canvas shirt. Blood tells, they say! Well, perhaps it does. Some say *my* father was a Prince of France;—may be! So, he is of your Order? Bah! I knew that the first day I saw his hands. Do you want me to tell you why he lives among us, buried like this?"

"Not if you violate any confidence to do so."

"Pardieu! he makes no confidence, I promise you. Not ten words will Monseigneur say, if he can help it, about anything. He is as silent as a lama; it is *populacier* to talk! But we learn things without being told in camp; and I know well enough he is here to save some one else, in some one's place; it is a *sacrifice*, look you, that nails him down to this martyrdom."

Her auditor was silent; she thought as the vivandière thought, but the pride in her, the natural reticence and reserve of her class, made her shrink from discussing the history of one whom she knew—shrink from having any argument on his past or future with a saucy, rough, fiery young camp-follower, who had broken thus unceremoniously on her privacy. Yet she needed greatly

to be able to trust Cigarette; the child was the only means through which she could send him a warning that must be sent; and there were a bravery and a truth in her which attracted the "aristocrat," to whom she was as singular and novel a rarity as though she were some young savage of desert western isles.

"Look you, Miladi," said Cigarette, half sullenly, half passionately, for the words were wrenched out of her generosity, and choked her in their utterance, "that man suffers: his life here is a hell upon earth—I don't mean for the danger, he is *bon soldat;* but for the indignity, the subordination, the license, the brutality, the tyranny. He is as if he were chained to the galleys. He never says anything, oh no! he is of your kind, you know! But he suffers. Mort de Dieu! he suffers. Now, if you be his friend, can you do nothing for him? Can you ransom him in no way? Can you go away out of Africa and leave him in this living death to get killed and thrust into the sand, like his comrade the other day?"

Her hearer did not answer; the words made her heart ache; they cut her to the soul. It was not for the first time that the awful desolation of his future had been present before her; but it was the first time that the fate to which she would pass away and leave him had been so directly in words before her. Cigarette, obeying the generous impulses of her better nature, and abandoning self with the same reckless impetuosity with which a moment before she would, if she could, have sacrificed her rival, saw the advantage gained, and pursued it with rapid skill. She was pleading against herself; no matter, in that instant she was capable of crucifying herself, and only remembering mercy to the absent.

"I have heard," she went on, vehemently, for the utterance to which she forced herself was very cruel to

her, "that you of the Noblesse are stanch as steel to your own people. It is the best virtue that you have. Well, he is of your people. Will you go away in your negligent indifference, and leave him to eat his heart out in bitterness and misery? He was your brother's friend; he was known to you in his early time; you have said so. And you are cold enough and cruel enough, Miladi, not to make one effort to redeem him out of bondage?—to go back to your palaces, and your pleasures, and your luxuries, and your flatteries, and be happy, while this man is left on bearing his yoke here? —and it is a yoke that galls, that kills!—bearing it until, in some day of desperation, he rebels, and is shot like a dog; or, in some day of mercy, a naked blade cuts its way to his heart, and makes its pulse cease forever? If you do, you patricians are worse still than I thought you!"

Venetia heard her without interruption; a great sadness came over her face as the vivid phrases followed each other. She was too absorbed in the subject of them to heed the challenge and the insolence of their manner. She knew that the Little One who spoke them loved him, though so tenacious to conceal her love; and she was touched, not less by the magnanimity which, for his sake, sought to release him from the African service, than by the hopelessness of his coming years as thus prefigured before her.

"Your reproaches are unneeded," she replied, slowly and wearily. "I could not abandon one who was once the friend of my family to such a fate as you picture without very great pain. But I do not see how to alter this fate, as you think I could do with so much ease. I am not in its secret; I do not know the reason of its seeming suicide; I have no more connection with its intricacies than you have. This gentleman has chosen

his own path; it is not for me to change his choice or spy into his motives."

Cigarette's flashing searching eyes bent all their brown light on her.

"Madame Corona, you are courageous; to those who are so, all things are possible."

"A great fallacy! You must have seen many courageous men vanquished. But what would you imply by it?"

"That you can help this man if you will."

"Would that I could; but I can discern no means——"

"Make them."

Even in that moment her listener smiled involuntarily at the curt imperious tones, decisive as Napoléon's "*Partons!*" before the Passage of the Alps.

"Be certain, if I can, I will. Meantime, there is one pressing danger of which you must be my medium to warn him. He and my brother must not meet. Tell him that the latter, knowing him only as Louis Victor, and interested in the incidents of his military career, will seek him out early to-morrow morning before we quit the camp. I must leave it to him to avoid the meeting as best he may be able."

Cigarette smiled grimly.

"You do not know much of the camp. Victor is only a *bas-officier*; if his officers call him up, he must come, or be thrashed like a slave for contumacy. He has no will of his own."

Venetia gave an irrepressible gesture of pain.

"True; I forgot. Well, go and send him to me. My brother must be taken into his confidence, whatever that confidence reveals. I will tell him so. Go and send him to me; it is the last chance."

Cigarette gave no movement of assent; all the jeal-

ous rage in her flared up afresh to stifle the noble and unselfish instincts under which she had been led during the later moments. A coarse and impudent scoff rose to her tongue, but it remained unuttered; she could not speak it under that glance, which held the evil in her in subjection, and compelled her reluctant reverence against her will.

"Tell him to come here to me," repeated Venetia, with the calm decision of one to whom any possibility of false interpretation of her motives never occurred, and who was habituated to the free action that accompanied an unassailable rank. "My brother must know what I know. I shall be alone, and he can make his way hither, without doubt, unobserved. Go and say this to him. You are his loyal little friend and comrade."

"If I be, I do not see why I am to turn *your* lackey, Madame," said Cigarette, bitterly. "If you want him, you can send for him by other messengers!"

Venetia Corona looked at her steadfastly, with a certain contempt in the look.

"Then your pleading for him was all insincere? Let the matter drop, and be good enough to leave my presence, which, you will remember, you entered unsummoned and undesired."

The undeviating gentleness of the tone made the rebuke cut deeper, as her first rebuke had cut, than any sterner censure or more peremptory dismissal could have done. Cigarette stood irresolute, ashamed, filled with rage, torn by contrition, impatient, wounded. swayed by jealous rage and by the purer impulses she strove to stifle.

The Cross she had tossed down caught her sight as it glittered on the carpet strewn over the hard earth; she stooped and raised it; the action sufficed to turn the

tide with her impressionable, ardent, capricious nature: she would not disgrace *that.*

"I will go," she muttered in her throat; "and you —you——O God! no wonder men love you when even I cannot hate you!"

Almost ere the words were uttered she had dashed aside the hangings before the tent entrance, and had darted out into the night air. Venetia Corona gazed after the swiftly flying figure as it passed over the starlit ground, lost in amazement, in pity, and in regret, wondering afresh if she had only dreamt of this strange interview in the Algerian camp, which seemed to have come and gone with the blinding rapidity of lightning.

"A little tigress!" she thought; "and yet with infinite nobility, with wonderful germs of good in her. Of such a nature what a rare life might have been made! As it is, her childhood we smile at and forgive; but, great Heaven! what will be her maturity, her old age! Yet how she loves him! And she is so brave she will not show it."

With the recollection came the remembrance of Cigarette's words as to his own passion for herself, and she grew paler as it did so. "God forbid he should have *that* pain too!" she murmured. "What could it be save misery for us both?"

Yet she did not thrust the fancy from her with contemptuous nonchalance as she had done every other of the many passions she had excited and disdained; it had a great sadness and a greater terror for her. She dreaded it unspeakably for him; also, perhaps, unconsciously, she dreaded it slightly for herself.

She wished now that she had not sent for him. But it was done; it was for sake of their old friendship; and she was not one to vainly regret what was un-

alterable, or to desert what she deemed generous and right for the considerations of prudence or of egotism.

CHAPTER XXXV

ORDEAL BY FIRE.

Amid the mirth, the noise, the festivity, which reigned throughout the camp as the men surrendered themselves to the enjoyment of the largesses of food and of wine allotted to them by their Marshal's command in commemoration of Zaraila, one alone remained apart, silent and powerless to rouse himself even to the forced semblance, the forced endurance, of their mischief and their pleasure. They knew him well, and they also loved him too well to press such participation on him. They knew that it was no lack of sympathy with them that made him so grave amid their mirth, so mute amid their volubility. Some thought that he was sorely wounded by the delay of the honors promised him. Others, who knew him better, thought that it was the loss of his brother-exile which weighed on him, and made all the scene around him full of pain. None approached him; but while they feasted in their tents, making the celebration of Zaraila equal to the Jour de Mazagran, he sat alone over a picket-fire on the far outskirts of the camp.

His heart was sick within him. To remain here was to risk with every moment that ordeal of recognition which he so unutterably dreaded; and to flee was to leave his name to the men, with whom he had served so long, covered with obloquy and odium, buried under

all the burning shame and degradation of a traitor's and deserter's memory. The latter course was impossible to him; the only alternative was to trust that the vastness of that great concrete body, of which he was one unit, would suffice to hide him from the discovery of the friend whose love he feared as he feared the hatred of no foe. He had not been seen as he had passed the flag-staff; there was little fear that in the few remaining hours any chance could bring the illustrious guest of a Marshal to the outpost of the scattered camp.

Yet he shuddered as he sat in the glow of the fire of pine wood; she was so near, and he could not behold her!—though he might never see her face again; though they must pass out of Africa, home to the land that he desired as only exiles can desire, while he still remained silent, knowing that, until death should release him, there could be no other fate for him, save only this one, hard, bitter, desolate, uncompanioned, unpitied, unrewarded life. But to break his word as the price of his freedom was not possible to his nature or in his creed. This fate was, in chief, of his own making: he accepted it without rebellion, because rebellion would have been in this case both cowardice and self-pity.

He was not conscious of any heroism in this; it seemed to him the only course left to a man who, in losing the position, had not abandoned the instincts of a gentleman.

The evening wore away, unmeasured by him; the echoes of the soldiers' mirth came dimly on his ear; the laughter, and the songs, and the music were subdued into one confused murmur by distance; there was nothing near him except a few tethered horses, and far away the mounted figure of the vidette who kept watch

beyond the boundaries of the encampment. The fire burned on, for it had been piled high before it was abandoned; the little white dog of his regiment was curled at his feet; he sat motionless, sunk in thought, with his head drooped upon his breast. The voice of Cigarette broke on his musing.

"*Beau sire*, you are wanted yonder."

He looked up wearily: could he never be at peace? He did not notice that the tone of the greeting was rough and curt; he did not notice that there was a stormy darkness, a repressed bitterness, stern and scornful, on the Little One's face; he only thought that the very dogs were left sometimes at rest and unchained, but a soldier never.

"You are wanted!" repeated Cigarette, with imperious contempt.

He rose, on the old instinct of obedience.

"For what?"

She stood looking at him without replying; her mouth was tightly shut in a hard line that pressed inward all its soft and rosy prettiness. She was seeing how haggard his face was, how heavy his eyes, how full of fatigue his movements. Her silence recalled him to the memory of the past day.

"Forgive me, my dear child, if I have seemed without sympathy in all your honors," he said, gently, as he laid his hand on her shoulder. "Believe me, it was unintentional. No one knows better than I how richly you deserved them; no one rejoices more that you should have received them."

The very gentleness of the apology stung her like a scorpion; she shook herself roughly out of his hold.

"*Point de phrases!* All the army is at my back; do you think I cannot do without *you?* Sympathy

too! Bah! We don't know those fine words in camp. You are wanted, I tell you;—go!"

"But where?"

"To your Silver Pheasant yonder;—go!"

"Who? I do not——"

"Dame! Can you not understand? Miladi wants to see you; I told her I would send you to her. You can use your dainty sentences with her; she is of your Order!"

"What! *she* wishes——"

"Go!" reiterated the Little One, with a stamp of her boot. "You know the great tent where she is throned in honor—Morbleu!—as if the oldest and ugliest hag that washes out my soldiers' linen were not of more use and more deserved such lodgment than Madame la Princesse, who has never done aught in her life, not even brushed out her own hair of gold! She waits for you. Where are your palace manners? Go to her, I tell you. She is of your own people: *we* are not!"

The vehement imperious phrases coursed in disorder one after another, rapid and harsh, and vibrating with a hundred repressed emotions. He paused one moment, doubting whether she did not play some trick upon him; then, without a word, left her, and went rapidly through the evening shadows.

Cigarette stood looking after him with a gaze that was very evil, almost savage, in its wrath, in its pain, in its fiery jealousy, that ached so hotly in her, and was chained down by that pride, which was as intense in the Vivandière of Algeria as ever it could be in any Duchess of a Court. Reckless, unfeminine, hardened, vitiated in much, as all her sex would have deemed, and capable of the utmost abandonment to her passion had it been returned, the haughty young soul of the child of the People was as sensitively delicate in this one

thing as the purest and chastest among women could have been; she dreaded above every other thing that he should ever suspect that she loved him, or that she desired his love.

Her honor, her generosity, her pity for him, her natural instinct to do the thing that was right, even to her foes, any one of the unstudied and unanalyzed qualities in her had made her serve him even at her rival's bidding. But it had cost her none the less hardly because so manfully done; none the less did all the violent ruthless hate, the vivid childlike fury, the burning, intolerable jealousy of her nature combat in her with the cruel sense of her own unlikeness with that beauty which had subdued even herself, and with that nobler impulse of self-sacrifice which grew side by side with the baser impulses of passion.

As she crouched down by the side of the fire, all the gracious spiritual light that had been upon her face was gone; there was something of the goaded, dangerous, sullen ferocity of a brave animal hard pressed and overdriven.

Her native generosity, the loyal disinterestedness of her love for him, had overborne the jealousy, the wounded vanity, and the desire of vengeance that reigned in her. Carried away by the first, she had, for the hour, risen above the last, and allowed the nobler wish to serve and rescue him prevail over the baser egotism. Nothing with her was ever premeditated; all was the offspring of the caprice or the impulse of the immediate moment. And now the reaction followed: she was only sensible of the burning envy that consumed her of this woman who seemed to her more than mortal in her wonderful fair loveliness, in her marvelous difference from everything of their sex that the camp and the barrack ever showed.

"And I have sent him to her when I should have fired my pistol into her breast!" she thought, as she sat by the dying embers. And she remembered once more the story of the Marseilles fisher-woman. She understood that terrible vengeance under the hot southern sun, beside the ruthless southern seas.

Meanwhile, he, who so little knew or heeded how he occupied her heart, passed unnoticed through the movements of the military crowds, crossed the breadth that parted the encampment from the marquees of the Generals and their guests, gave the countersign and approached unarrested, and so far unseen save by the sentinels, the tents of the Corona suite. The Marshal and his male visitors were still over their banquet wines; she had withdrawn early, on the plea of fatigue; there was no one to notice his visit except the men on guard, who concluded that he went by command. In the dusky light, for the moon was very young, and the flare of the torches made the shadows black and uncertain, no one recognized him; the few soldiers stationed about saw one of their own troopers, and offered him no opposition, made him no question. He knew the password; that was sufficient. The Levantine waiting near the entrance drew the tent-folds aside and signed to him to enter; another moment, and he was in the presence of her mistress, in that dim amber light from the standing candelabra, in that heavy soft-scented air perfumed from the aloe-wood burning in a brazier, through which he saw, half blinded at first coming from the darkness without, that face which subdued and dazzled even the antagonism and the lawlessness of Cigarette.

He bowed low before her, preserving that distant ceremonial due from the rank he ostensibly held to hers.

"Madame, this is very merciful! I know not how to thank you."

She motioned to him to take a seat near to her, while the Levantine, who knew nothing of the English tongue, retired to the farther end of the tent.

"I only kept my word," she answered, "for we leave the camp to-morrow; Africa next week."

"So soon!"

She saw the blood forsake the bronzed fairness of his face, and leave a dusky pallor there. It wounded her as if she suffered herself. For the first time she believed what the Little One had said;—that this man loved her.

"I sent for you," she continued, hurriedly, her graceful languor and tranquillity, for the first time, stirred and quickened by emotion, almost by embarrassment. "It was very strange, it was very painful, for me to trust that child with such a message. But you know us of old; you know we do not forsake our friends for considerations of self-interest or outward semblance. We act as we deem right; we do not heed untrue constructions. There are many things I desire to say to you——"

She paused; he merely bent his head; he could not trust the calmness of his voice in answer.

"First," she continued, "I must entreat you to allow me to tell Philip what I know. You cannot conceive how intensely oppressive it becomes to me to have any secret from him. I never concealed so much as a thought from my brother in all my life, and to evade even a mute question from his brave frank eyes makes me feel a traitress to him."

"Anything else," he muttered. "Ask me anything else. For God's sake, do not let him dream that I live!"

"But why? You still speak to me in enigmas. To-morrow, moreover, before we leave, he intends to seek

you out as what he thinks you—a soldier of France. He is interested by all he hears of your career; he was first interested by what I told him of you when he saw the ivory carvings at my villa. I asked the little vivandière to tell you this, but, on second thoughts, it seemed best to see you myself once more, as I had promised."

There was a slow weariness in the utterance of the words. She had said that she could not reflect on leaving him to such a fate as this of his in Africa without personal suffering, or without an effort to induce him to reconsider his decision to condemn himself to it for evermore.

"That French child," she went on, rapidly, to cover both the pain that she felt and that she dealt, "forced her entrance here in a strange fashion; she wished to see me, I suppose, and to try my courage too. She is a little brigand, but she has a true and generous nature, and she loves you very loyally."

"Cigarette?" he asked, wearily; his thoughts could not stay for either pity or interest for her in this moment. "Oh no!—I trust not. I have done nothing to win her love; and she is a fierce little *condottiera* who disdains all such weakness. She forced her way in here? That was unpardonable; but she seems to bear a singular dislike to you."

"Singular indeed! I never saw her until to-day."

He answered nothing; the conviction stole on him that Cigarette hated her because he loved her.

"And yet she brought you my message?" pursued his companion. "That seems her nature—violent passions, yet thorough loyalty. But time is precious. I must urge on you what I bade you come to hear. It is to implore you to put your trust, your confidence, in Philip. You have acknowledged to me that you are

guiltless—no one who knows what you once were could ever doubt it for an instant—then let him hear this, let him be your judge as to what course is right and what wrong for you to pursue. It is impossible for me to return to Europe knowing you are living thus and leaving you to such a fate. What motive you have to sentence yourself to such eternal banishment I am ignorant; but all I ask of you is, confide in him. Let him learn that you live; let him decide whether or not this sacrifice of yourself be needed. His honor is as punctilious as that of any man on earth; his friendship you can never doubt. Why conceal anything from him?"

His eyes turned on her with that dumb agony which once before had chilled her to the soul.

"Do you think, if I *could* speak in honor, I should not tell *you* all?"

A flush passed over her face, the first that the gaze of any man had ever brought there. She understood him.

"But," she said, gently and hurriedly, "may it not be that you overrate the obligations of honor? I know that many a noble-hearted man has inexorably condemned himself to a severity of rule that a dispassionate judge of his life might deem very exaggerated, very unnecessary. It is so natural for an honorable man to so dread that he should do a dishonorable thing through self-interest or self-pity, that he may very well overestimate the sacrifice required of him through what he deems justice or generosity. May it not be so with you? I can conceive no reason that can be strong enough to require of you such fearful surrender of every hope, such utter abandonment of your own existence."

Her voice failed slightly over the last words; she could not think with calmness of the destiny that he

accepted. Involuntarily some prescience of pain that would forever pursue her own life unless his were rescued lent an intense earnestness, almost entreaty, to her argument. She did not bear him love as yet; she had seen too little of him, too lately only known him as her equal; but there were in her, stronger than she knew, a pity, a tenderness, a regret, an honor for him that drew her toward him with an indefinable attraction, and would sooner or later warm and deepen into love. Already it was sufficient, though she deemed it but compassion and friendship, to make her feel that an intolerable weight would lie heavy on her future if his should remain condemned to this awful isolation and oblivion while she alone of all the world should know and hold his secret.

He started from her side as he heard, and paced to and fro the narrow limits of the tent like a caged animal. For the first time it grew a belief to him, in his thoughts, that were he free, were he owner of his heritage, he could rouse her heart from its long repose and make her love him with the soft and passionate warmth of his dead Arab mistress—a thing that had been as distant from her negligence and her pride as warmth from the diamond or the crystal. He felt as if the struggle would kill him. He had but to betray his brother, and he would be unchained from his torture; he had but to break his word, and he would be at liberty. All the temptation that had before beset him paled and grew as naught beside this possibility of the possession of her love which dawned upon him now.

She, knowing nothing of this which moved him, believed only that he weighed her words in hesitation, and strove to turn the balance.

"Hear me," she said, softly. "I do not bid you decide; I only bid you confide in Philip—in one who,

as you must well remember, would sooner cut off his own hand than counsel a base thing, or do an unfaithful act. You are guiltless of this charge under which you left England; you endure it rather than do what you deem dishonorable to clear yourself. That is noble —that is great. But it is possible, as I say, that you may exaggerate the abnegation required of you. Whoever was the criminal, should suffer. Yours is magnificent magnanimity; but it may surely be also false justice alike to yourself and the world."

He turned on her almost fiercely in the suffering she dealt him:

"It *is!* It was a madness—a Quixotism—the wild, unconsidered act of a fool. What you will! But it is done; it was done forever—so long ago—when your young eyes looked on me in the pity of your innocent childhood. I cannot redeem its folly now by adding to its baseness. I cannot change the choice of a madman by repenting of it with a coward's caprice. Ah, God! you do not know what you do—how you tempt. For pity's sake, urge me no more. Help me—strengthen me—to be true to my word. Do not bid me do evil that I may enter paradise through my sin!"

He threw himself down beside her as the incoherent words poured out, his arms flung across the pile of cushions on which he had been seated, his face hidden on them. His teeth clinched on his tongue till the blood flowed; he felt that if the power of speech remained with him he should forswear every law that had bound him to silence, and tell her all, whatever the cost.

She looked at him, she heard him, moved to a greater agitation than ever had had sway over her, for the first time the storm winds that swept by her did not leave her passionless and calm; this man's whole future was

in her hands. She could bid him seek happiness, dishonored; or cleave to honor, and accept wretchedness forever.

It was a fearful choice to hold.

"Answer me. Choose for me!" he said, vehemently. "Be my law, and be my God!"

She gave a gesture almost of fear.

"Hush, hush! The woman does not live who should be that to any man."

"You shall be it to me! Choose for me!"

"I cannot! You leave so much in darkness and untold——"

"Nothing that you need know to decide your choice for me, save one thing only——that I love you."

She shuddered.

"This is madness! What have you seen of me?"

"Enough to love you while my life shall last, and love no other woman. Ah! I was but an African trooper in your sight, but in my own I was your equal. You only saw a man to whom your gracious alms and your gentle charity were to be given, as a queen may stoop in mercy to a beggar; but I saw one who had the light of my old days in her smile, the sweetness of my old joys in her eyes, the memories of my old world in her every grace and gesture. You forget! I was nothing to you; but you were so much to me. I loved you the first moment that your voice fell on my ear. It is madness! Oh yes! I should have said so too in those old years. A madness I would have sworn never to feel. But I have lived a hard life since then, and no men ever love like those who suffer. Now you know all; know the worst that tempts me. No famine, no humiliation, no obloquy, no loss I have known, ever drove me so cruelly to buy back my happiness with the price of dishonor as this one desire, to stand in my

rightful place before men, and be free to strive with you for what they have not won!"

As she heard, all the warmth, all the life, faded out of her face; it grew as white as his own, and her lips parted slightly, as though to draw her breath was oppressive. The wild words overwhelmed her with their surprise not less than they shocked her with their despair. An intense truth vibrated through them, a truth that pierced her and reached her heart, as no other such supplication ever had done. She had no love for him yet, or she thought not; she was very proud, and resisted such passions; but in that moment the thought swept by her that such love might be possible. It was the nearest submission to it she had ever given. She heard him in unbroken silence; she kept silence long after he had spoken. So far as her courage and her dignity could be touched with it, she felt something akin to terror at the magnitude of the choice left to her.

"You give me great pain, great surprise," she murmured. "All I can trust is, that your love is of such sudden birth that it will die as rapidly——"

He interrupted her:

"You mean that, under no circumstances—not even were I to possess my inheritance—could you give me any hope that I might wake your tenderness?"

She looked at him full in the eyes with the old, fearless, haughty instinct of refusal to all such entreaty, which had made her so indifferent—and many said so pitiless—to all. At his gaze, however, her own changed and softened, grew shadowed, and then wandered from him.

"I do not say that. I cannot tell——"

The words were very low: she was too truthful to conceal from him what half dawned on herself—the

possibility that, more in his presence and under different circumstances, she might feel her heart go to him with a warmer and a softer impulse than that of friendship. The heroism of his life had moved her greatly.

His head dropped down again upon his arms.

"O God! It is *possible* at least! I am blind—mad. Make my choice for me! I know not what I do."

The tears that had gathered in her eyes fell slowly down over her colorless cheeks; she looked at him with a pity that made her heart ache with a sorrow only less than his own. The grief was for him chiefly: yet something of it for herself. Some sense of present bitterness that fell on her from his fate, some foreboding of future regret that would inevitably and forever follow her when she left him to his loneliness and his misery, smote on her with a weightier pang than any her caressed and cloudless existence had encountered. Love was dimly before her as the possibility he called it; remote, unrealized, still unacknowledged, but possible under certain conditions, only known as such when it was also impossible through circumstances.

He had suffered silently; endured strongly; fought greatly: these were the only means through which any man could have ever reached her sympathy, her respect, her tenderness. Yet though a very noble and a very generous woman, she was also a woman of the world. She knew that it was not for her to say even thus much to a man who was in one sense well-nigh a stranger, and who stood under the accusation of a crime whose shadow he allowed to rest on him unmoved. She felt sick at heart: she longed unutterably, with a warmer longing than had moved her previously, to bid him, at all cost, lay bare his past, and throw off the imputed shame that

lay on him. Yet all the grand traditions of her race forbade her to counsel the acceptance of an escape whose way led through a forfeiture of honor.

"Choose for me, Venetia!" he muttered at last once more.

She rose with what was almost a gesture of despair, and thrust the gold hair off her temples.

"Heaven help me, I cannot—I dare not! And—I am no longer capable of being just!"

There was an accent almost of passion in her voice; she felt that so greatly did she desire his deliverance, his justification, his return to all which was his own, desired even his presence among them in her own world, that she could no longer give him calm and unbiased judgment. He heard, and the burning tide of a new joy rushed on him, checked almost ere it was known, by the dread lest for her sake she should ever give him so much pity that such pity became love.

He started to his feet and looked down imploringly into her eyes—a look under which her own never quailed or drooped, but which they answered with that same regard which she had given him when she had declared her faith in his innocence.

"If I thought it possible you could ever care——"

She moved slightly from him; her face was very white still, and her voice, though serenely sustained, shook as it answered him:

"If I could—believe me, I am not a woman who would bid you forsake your honor to spare yourself or me. Let us speak no more of this! What can it avail, except to make you suffer greater things? Follow the counsels of your own conscience. You have been true to them hitherto; it is not for me, or through me, that you shall ever be turned aside from them."

A bitter sigh broke from him as he heard.

"They are noble words. And yet it is so easy to utter, so hard to follow them. If you had one thought of tenderness for me, you could not speak them."

A flush passed over her face.

"Do not think me without feeling—without sympathy—pity——"

"These are not love."

She was silent; they were, in a sense, nearer to love than any emotion she had ever known.

"If you loved me," he pursued, passionately—"ah, God! the very word from me to you sounds insult; and yet there is not one thought in me that does not honor you—if you loved me, could you stand there and bid me drag on this life forever, nameless, friendless, hopeless, having all the bitterness but none of the torpor of death, wearing out the doom of a galley slave, though guiltless of all crime?"

"Why speak so? You are unreasoning; a moment ago you implored me not to tempt you to the violation of what you hold your honor; because I bid you be faithful to it, you deem me cruel!"

"Heaven help me! I scarce know what I say. I ask you, if you were a woman who loved me, could you decide thus?"

"These are wild questions," she murmured; "what can they serve? I believe that I should—I am sure that I should. As it is—as your friend——"

"Ah, hush! Friendship is crueller than hate."

"Cruel?"

"Yes; the worst cruelty when we seek love—a stone proffered us when we ask for bread in famine!"

There was desperation, almost ferocity, in the answer; she was moved and shaken by it—not to fear, for fear was not in her nature, but to something of awe, and something of the despairing hopelessness that was in him.

"Lord Royallieu," she said, slowly, as if the familiar name were some tie between them, some cause of excuse for these, the only love words she had ever heard without disdain and rejection—"Lord Royallieu, it is unworthy of you to take this advantage of an interview which I sought, and sought for your own sake. You pain me, you wound me. I cannot tell how to answer you. You speak strangely, and without warrant."

He stood mute and motionless before her, his head sunk on his chest. He knew that she rebuked him justly; he knew that he had broken through every law he had prescribed himself, and that he had sinned against that code of chivalry which should have made her sacred from such words while they were those he could not utter, nor she hear, except in secrecy and shame. Unless he could stand justified in her sight and in that of all men, he had no right to seek to wring out tenderness from her regret and from her pity. Yet all his heart went out to her in one irrepressible entreaty.

"Forgive me, for pity's sake! After to-night I shall never look upon your face again."

"I do forgive," she said gently, while her voice grew very sweet. "You endure too much already for one needless pang to be added by me. All I wish is, that you had never met me, so that this last, worst thing had not come unto you!"

A long silence fell between them; where she leaned back among her cushions, her face was turned from him. He stood motionless in the shadow, his head still dropped upon his breast, his breathing loud and slow and hard. To speak of love to her was forbidden to him, yet the insidious temptation wound closer and closer round his strength. He had only to betray the man he had sworn to protect, and she would know his

innocence, she would hear his passion; he would be free, and she—he grew giddy as the thought rose before him—she might, with time, be brought to give him other tenderness than that of friendship. He seemed to touch the very supremacy of joy, to reach it almost with his hand, to have honors and peace, and all the glory of her haughty loveliness, and all the sweetness of her subjugation, and all the soft delights of passions before him in their golden promise, and he was held back in bands of iron, he was driven out from them desolate and accurst.

Unlike Cain, he had suffered in his brother's stead, yet, like Cain, he was branded and could only wander out into the darkness and the wilderness.

She watched him many minutes, he unconscious of her gaze; and while she did so, many conflicting emotions passed over the colorless delicacy of her features; her eyes were filled and shadowed with many altering thoughts; her heart was waking from its rest, and the high, generous, unselfish nature in her strove with her pride of birth, her dignity of habit.

"Wait," she said, softly, with the old imperial command of her voice subdued, though not wholly banished. "I think you have mistaken me somewhat. You wrong me if you think that I could be so callous, so indifferent, as to leave you here without heed as to your fate. Believe in your innocence you know that I do, as firmly as though you substantiated it with a thousand proofs; reverence your devotion to your honor you are certain that I must, or all better things were dead in me."

Her voice sank inaudible for the instant; she recovered her self-control with an effort.

"You reject my friendship—you term it cruel—but at least it will be faithful to you; too faithful for me to

pass out of Africa and never give you one thought again. *I believe in you.* Do you not know that that is the highest trust, to my thinking, that one human life can show in another's? You decide that it is your duty not to free yourself from this bondage, not to expose the actual criminal, not to take up your rights of birth. I dare not seek to alter that decision. But I cannot leave you to such a future without infinite pain, and there must—there shall be—means through which you will let me hear of you—through which, at least, I can know that you are living."

She stretched her hands toward him with that same gesture with which she had first declared her faith in his guiltlessness; the tears trembled in her voice and swam in her eyes. As she had said, she suffered for him exceedingly. He, hearing those words which breathed the only pity that had never humiliated him, and the loyal trust which was but the truer because the sincerity of faith in lieu of the insanity of love dictated it, made a blind, staggering, unconscious movement of passionate dumb agony. He seized her hands in his and held them close against his breast one instant, against the loud hard panting of his aching heart.

"God reward you! God keep you! If I stay, I shall tell you all; let me go, and forget that we ever met! I am dead—let me be dead to you!"

With another instant he had left the tent and passed out into the red glow of the torchlit evening. And Venetia Corona dropped her proud head down upon the silken cushions where his own had rested, and wept as women weep over their dead—in such a passion as had never come to her in all the course of her radiant, victorious, and imperious life.

It seemed to her as if she had seen him slain in cold

blood, and had never lifted her hand or her voice against his murder.

His voice rang in her ear; his face was before her with its white still rigid anguish; the burning accents of his avowal of love seemed to search her very heart. If this man perished in any of the thousand perils of war she would forever feel herself his assassin. She had his secret, she had his soul, she had his honor in her hands; and she could do nothing better for them both than to send him from her to eternal silence, to eternal solitude!

Her thoughts grew unbearable; she rose impetuously from her couch and paced to and fro the narrow confines of her tent. Her tranquillity was broken down; her pride was abandoned; her heart, at length, was reached and sorely wounded. The only man she had ever found, whom it would have been possible to her to have loved, was one already severed from her by a fate almost more hideous than death.

And yet, in her loneliness, the color flushed back into her face; her eyes gathered some of their old light; one dreaming shapeless fancy floated vaguely through her mind.

If, in the years to come, she knew him in all ways worthy, and learned to give him back this love he bore her, it was in her to prove that love at no matter what cost to her pride and her lineage. If his perfect innocence were made clear in her own sight, there was greatness and there was unselfishness enough in her nature to make her capable of regarding alone his martyrdom and his heroism, and disregarding the opinion of the world. If hereafter she grew to find his presence the necessity of her life, and his sacrifice of that nobility, and of that purity, she now believed it, she—proud as she was with the twin pride of lineage

and of nature—would be capable of incurring the odium and the marvel of all who knew her by uniting her fate to his own, by making manifest her honor and her tenderness for him, though men saw in him only a soldier of the empire, only a base-born trooper, beneath her, as Riom beneath the daughter of D'Orléans. She was of a brave nature, of a great nature, of a daring courage, and of a superb generosity. Abhorring dishonor, full of glory in the stainless history of her race, and tenacious of the dignity and of the magnitude of her House, she yet was too courageous and too haughty a woman not to be capable of braving calumny if conscious of her own pure rectitude beneath it, not to be capable of incurring false censure, if encountered in the path of justice and of magnanimity. It was possible, even on herself it dawned as possible, that so great might become her compassion and her tenderness for this man, that she would, in some distant future, when the might of his love and the severity of his suffering should prevail with her, say to him:

"Keep your secret from the world as you will. Prove your innocence only to me; let me and the friend of your youth alone know your name and your rights. And knowing all, knowing you myself to be hero and martyr in one, I shall not care what the world thinks of you, what the world says of me. I will be your wife: I have lands, and riches, and honors, and greatness enough to suffice for us both."

If ever she loved him exceedingly, she would become capable of this sacrifice from the strength, and the graciousness, and the fearlessness of her nature, and such love was not so distant from her as she thought.

* * * * * *

Outside her tent there was a peculiar mingling of light and shadow; of darkness from the moonless and

now cloud-covered sky, of reddened warmth from the tall burning pine-boughs thrust into the soil in lieu of other illumination. The atmosphere was hot from the flames, and chilly with the breath of the night winds; it was oppressively still, though from afar off the sounds of laughter in the camp still echoed, and near at hand the dull and steady tramp of the sentinels fell on the hard parched soil. Into that blended heat and cold, dead blackness and burning glare, he reeled out from her presence; drunk with pain as deliriously as men grow drunk with raki. The challenge rang on the air:

"Who goes there?"

He never heard it. Even the old long-accustomed habits of a soldier's obedience were killed in him.

"Who goes there?" the challenge rang again.

Still he never heard, but went on blindly. From where the tents stood, there was a stronger breadth of light through which he had passed, and was passing still—a light strong enough for it to be seen whence he came, but not strong enough to show his features.

"Halt, or I fire!" The sentinel brought the weapon to his shoulder and took a calm, close, sure aim. He did not speak; the password he had forgotten as though he had never heard or never given it.

Another figure than that of the soldier on guard came out of the shadow, and stood between him and the sentinel. It was that of Châteauroy; he was mounted on his gray horse and wrapped in his military cloak, about to go the round of the cavalry camp. Their eyes met in the wavering light like the glow from a furnace-mouth: in a glance they knew each other.

"It is one of my men," said the chief carelessly to the sentinel. "Leave me to deal with him."

The guard saluted, and resumed his beat.

"Why did you refuse the word, sir?"

"I did not hear."

"And why did you not hear?"

There was no reply.

"Why are you absent from your squadron?"

There was no reply still.

"Have you no tongue, sir? The matraque shall soon make you speak! Why are you here?"

There was again no answer.

Châteauroy's teeth ground out a furious oath; yet a flash of brutal delight glittered in his eyes. At last he had hounded down this man, so long out of his reach, into disobedience and contumacy.

"Why are you here, and where have you been?" he demanded once more.

"I will not say."

The answer, given at length, was tranquil, low, slowly and distinctly uttered, in a deliberate refusal, in a deliberate defiance.

The dark and evil countenance above him grew livid with fury.

"I can have you thrashed like a dog for that answer, and I will. But first listen here, *beau sire!* I know as well as though you had confessed to me. Your silence cannot shelter your great mistress's shame. Ah-ha! la Faustine! So Madame votre Princesse is so cold to her equals, only to choose her lovers out of my blackguards, and take her midnight intrigues like a camp courtesan!"

Cecil's face changed terribly as the vile words were spoken. With the light and rapid spring of a leopard, he reached the side of his commander, one hand on the horse's mane, the other on the wrist of his chief, that it gripped like an iron vice.

"*You lie!* And you know that you lie. Breathe

her name once more, and, by God, as we are both living men, I will have your life for your outrage!"

And, as he spoke, with his left hand he smote the lips that had blasphemed against her.

It was broken asunder at last—all the long and bitter patience, all the calm and resolute endurance, all the undeviating serenity beneath provocation, which had never yielded through twelve long years, but which had borne with infamy and with tyranny with such absolute submission for sake of those around him, who would revolt at his sign, and be slaughtered for his cause. The promise he had given to endure all things for their sakes—the sakes of his soldiery, of his comrades—was at last forgotten. All he remembered was the vileness that dared touch her name, the shame that through him was breathed on her. Rank, duty, bondage, consequence, all were forgotten in that one instant of insult that mocked in its odious lie at her purity. He was no longer the soldier bound in obedience to submit to the indignities that his chief chose to heap on him; he was a gentleman who defended a woman's honor, a man who avenged a slur on the life that he loved.

Châteauroy wrenched his wrist out of the hold that crushed it, and drew his pistol. Cecil knew that the laws of active service would hold him but justly dealt with if the shot laid him dead in that instant for his act and his words.

"You can kill me—I know it. Well, use your prerogative; it will be the sole good you have ever done to me."

And he stood erect, patient, motionless, looking into his chief's eyes with a calm disdain, with an unuttered challenge that, for the first moment, wrung something of savage respect and of sullen admiration out from the soul of his great foe.

He did not fire; it was the only time in which any trait of abstinence from cruelty had been ever seen in him. He signed to the soldiers of the guard with one hand, while with the other he still covered with his pistol the man whom martial law would have allowed him to have shot down, or have cut down, at his horse's feet.

"Arrest him," he said, simply.

Cecil offered no resistance; he let them seize and disarm him without an effort at the opposition which could have been but a futile, unavailing trial of brute force. He dreaded lest there should be one sound that should reach *her* in that tent where the triad of standards drooped in the dusky distance. He had been, moreover, too long beneath the yoke of that despotic and irresponsible authority to waste breath or to waste dignity in vain contest with the absolute and the immutable. He was content with what he had done—content to have met once, not as soldier to chief, but as man to man, the tyrant who held his fate.

For once beneath the spur of that foul outrage to the dignity and the innocence of the woman he had quitted, he had allowed a passionate truth to force its way through the barriers of rank and the bonds of subservience. Insult to himself he had borne as the base prerogative of his superior, but insult to her he had avenged with the vengeance of equal to equal, of the man who loved on the man who calumniated her.

And as he sat in the darkness of the night with the heavy tramp of his guards forever on his ear, there was peace rather than rebellion in his heart—the peace of one heartsick with strife and with temptation, who beholds in death a merciful ending to the ordeal of existence. "I shall die in her cause at least," he thought. "I could be content if I were only sure that she would never know."

For this was the chief dread which hung on him, that she should ever know, and in knowing, suffer for his sake.

The night rolled on, the army around him knew nothing of what had happened. Châteauroy, conscious of his own coarse guilt against the guest of his Marshal, kept the matter untold and undiscovered, under the plea that he desired not to destroy the harmony of the general rejoicing. The one or two field-officers with whom he took counsel agreed to the wisdom of letting the night pass away undisturbed. The accused was the idol of his own squadron: there was no gauge what might not be done by troops heated with excitement and drunk with wine, if they knew that their favorite comrade had set the example of insubordination, and would be sentenced to suffer for it. Beyond these, and the men employed in his arrest and guard, none knew what had chanced: not the soldiery beneath that vast sea of canvas, many of whom would have rushed headlong to mutiny and to destruction at his word; not the woman who in the solitude of her wakeful hours was haunted by the memory of his love-words, and felt steal on her the unacknowledged sense, that if his future were left to misery, happiness could never more touch her own; not the friend of his early days, laughing and drinking with the officers of the staff.

None knew; not even Cigarette. She sat alone, so far away that none sought her out, beside the picket-fire that had long died out, with the little white dog of Zaraila curled on the scarlet folds of her skirt. Her arms rested on her knees, and her temples were leant on her hands tightly twisted among the dark silken curls of her boyish hair. Her face had the same dusky savage intensity upon it; and she never once moved from that rigid attitude.

She had the Cross on her heart—the idol of her long desire, the star to which her longing eyes had looked up ever since her childhood through the reek of carnage and the smoke of battle: and she would have flung it away like dross to have had his lips touch hers once with *love*.

"*Que je suis folle!*" she muttered in her throat, "*que je suis folle!*"

And she knew herself mad; for the desires and the delights of love die swiftly, but the knowledge of honor abides always. Love would have made her youth, sweet with an unutterable gladness, to glide from her and leave her weary, dissatisfied, forsaken. But that Cross, the gift of her country, the symbol of her heroism, would be with her always, and light her forever with the honor of which it was the emblem; and if her life should last until youth passed away, and age came, and with age death, her hand would wander to it on her dying bed, and she would smile as she died to hear the living watchers murmur: "That life had glory—that life was lived for France."

She knew this: but she was young; she was a woman-child, she had the ardor of passionate youth in her veins, she had the desolation of abandoned youth in her heart. And honor looked so cold beside love!

She rose impetuously; the night was far spent, the camp was very still, the torches had long died out, and a streak of dawn was visible in the east. She stood awhile looking very earnestly across the wide black city of tents.

"I shall be best away for a time. I grow mad, treacherous, wicked here," she thought. "I will go and see Blanc-Bec."

Blanc-Bec was the soldier of the Army of Italy.

In a brief while she had saddled and bridled Etoile-

Filante, and ridden out of the camp without warning or farewell to any: she was as free to come and to go as though she were a bird on the wing. Thus she went, knowing nothing of his fate. And with the sunrise went also the woman whom he loved—in ignorance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE VENGEANCE OF THE LITTLE ONE.

The warm transparent light of an African autumnal noon shone down through the white canvas roof of a great tent in the heart of the encamped divisions at the head-quarters of the Army of the South. In the tent there was a densely packed throng—an immense, close, hushed, listening crowd, of which every man wore the uniform of France, of which the mute undeviating attention, forbidden by discipline alike to be broken by sound of approval or dissent, had in it something that was almost terrible, contrasted with the vivid eagerness in their eyes and the strained absorption of their countenances; for they were in court, and that court was the Conseil de Guerre of their own southern camp.

The prisoner was arraigned on the heaviest charge that can be laid against the soldier of any army, and yet, as the many eyes of the military crowd turned on him where he stood surrounded by his guard, his crime against his chief was forgotten, and they only remembered—Zaraila.

Many of those present had seen him throughout that day of blood, at the head of his decimated squadron, with the guidon held aloft above every foe; to them

that tall, slender form standing there, with a calm, weary dignity, that had nothing of the passion of the mutinous or the consciousness of the criminal in its serene repose, had shed upon it the luster of a heroism that made them ready almost to weep like women that the death of a mutineer should be the sole answer given by France to the savior of her honor.

He preserved entire reticence in court. The instant the acte d'accusation had been read to him, he had seen that his chief would not dare to couple with it the proud, pure name he had dared to outrage; his most bitter anxiety was thus at an end. For all the rest, he was tranquil.

No case could be clearer, briefer, less complex, more entirely incapable of defense. The soldiers of the guard gave evidence as to the violence and fury of the assault. The sentinel bore witness to having heard the refusal to reply; a moment after, he had seen the attack made and the blow given. The accuser merely stated that, meeting his *sous-officier* out of the bounds of the cavalry camp, he had asked him where he had been, and why he was there, and, on his commanding an answer, had been assaulted in the manner described, with violence sufficient to have cost his life had not the guard been so near at hand. When questioned as to what motive he could assign for the act, he replied that he considered his corporal had always incited evil feeling and mutinous conduct in the squadrons, and had, he believed, that day attributed to himself his failure to receive the Cross. The statement passed without contradiction by the prisoner, who, to the interrogations and entreaties of his legal *défenseur*, only replied that the facts were stated accurately as they occurred, and that his reasons for the deed he declined to assert.

When once more questioned as to his country and his

past by the president, he briefly declined to give answer. When asked if the names by which he was enrolled were his own, he replied that they were two of his baptismal names, which had served his purpose on entering the army. When asked if he accepted as true the charge of exciting sedition among the troops, he replied that it was so little true that, over and over again, the men would have mutinied if he had given them a sign, and that he had continually induced them to submit to discipline sheerly by force of his own example. When interrogated as to the cause of the language he had used to his commanding officer, he said briefly that the language deserved the strongest censure as from a soldier to his colonel, but that it was justified as he had used it, which was as man to man, though he was aware that the plea availed nothing in military law, and was impermissible for the safety of the service. When it was inquired of him if he had not repeatedly inveighed against his commanding officer for severity, he briefly denied it; no man had ever heard him say a syllable that could have been construed into complaint; at the same time, he observed that all the squadrons knew perfectly well that personal enmity and oppression had been shown him by his chief throughout the whole time of his association with the regiment. When pressed as to the cause that he assigned for this, he gave, in a few comprehensive outlines, the story of the capture and the deliverance of the Emir's bride; this was all that could be elicited from him; and even this was answered only out of deference to the authority of the court, and from his unwillingness, even now, to set a bad example before the men with whom he had served so long. When it was finally demanded of him if he had aught to urge in his own extenuation, he paused a moment, with a gaze under which even the hard eagle eyes grew restless,

looked across to Châteauroy, and addressed his antagonist rather than the president:

"Only this: that a tyrant, a liar, and a traducer cannot wonder if men prefer death to submission beneath insult. But I am well aware this is no vindication of my act as a soldier, and I have no desire to say words which, whatever their truth, might become hereafter dangerous legacies, and dangerous precedents to the army."

That was all which he answered, and neither his counsel nor his accusers could extort another syllable from him.

He knew that what he had done was justified to his own conscience, but he did not seek to dispute that it was unjustifiable in military law. True, had all been told, it was possible enough that his judges would exonerate him morally, even if they condemned him legally; his act would be seen blameless as a man's, even while still punishable as a soldier's; but to purchase immunity for himself at the cost of bringing the fairness of her fame into the coarse babble of men's tongues was an alternative, craven and shameful, which never even once glanced across his thoughts.

He had kept faith to a woman whom he had known heartless and well-nigh worthless; it was not to the woman whom he loved with all the might of an intense passion, and whom he knew pure and glorious as the morning sun, that he would break his faith now.

All through the three days that the conseil sat his look and his manner never changed: the first was quite calm, though very weary; the latter courteous, but resolute, with the unchanged firmness of one who knew his own past action justified; for the rest, many noticed that, during the chief of the long exhausting hours of his examination and his trial, his thoughts seemed far

away, and he appeared to recall them to the present with difficulty, and with nothing of the vivid suspense of an accused, whose life and death swung in the judgment-balance.

In truth, he had no dread as he had no hope left; he knew well enough that by the blow which had vindicated her honor he had forfeited his own existence. All he wished was that his sentence had been dealt without this formula of debate and of delay, which could have issue but in one end. There was not one man in court who was not more moved than he, more quick to terror and regret for his doom. To many among his comrades who had learned to love the gentle, silent "aristocrat," who bore every hardship so patiently, and humanized them so imperceptibly by the simple force of an unvaunted example, those three days were torture. Wild, brutal brigands, whose year was one long razzia of plunder, rapine, and slaughter, felt their lips tremble like young girls' when they asked how the issue went for him; and the blood-stained marauders, who thought as little of assassination for a hidden pot of gold as butchers of drawing a knife across a sheep's throat, grew still and fear-stricken with a great awe when the muttering passed through the camp that they would see no more among their ranks that "woman's face" which they had beheld so often foremost in the fight, with a look on it that thrilled their hearts like their forbidden chant of the Marseillaise. For when the third day closed, they knew that he must die.

There were men, hard as steel, ravenous of blood as vultures, who, when they heard that sentence given, choked great deep sobs down into the cavernous depths of their broad seared sinewy breasts; but he never gave sign or sign. He never moved once while the de-

cree of death was read to him; and there was no change in the weary calmness of his eyes. He bent his head in acquiescence.

"C'est bien!" he said, simply.

It seemed well to him: dead, his secret would lie in the grave with him, and the long martyrdom of his life be ended.

* * * * * *

In the brightness of the noon Cigarette leaned out of her little oval casement that framed her head like an old black oak carving—a head with the mellow bloom on its cheeks, and the flash of scarlet above its dark curls, and the robin-like grace of poise and balance as it hung out there in the sun.

Cigarette had been there a whole hour in thought; she! who never had wasted a moment in meditation or reverie, and who found the long African day all too short for her busy, abundant, joyous life, that was always full of haste and work, just as a bird's will seem so, though the bird have no more to do than to fly at its will through summer air, and feed at its will from brook and from berry, from a ripe ear of the corn or from a deep cup of the lily. For the first time she was letting time drift away in the fruitless labor of vain, purposeless thought, because, for the first time also, happiness was not with her.

They were gone forever—all the elastic joyaunce, all the free fair hours, all the dauntless gayety of childhood, all the sweet harmonious laughter of a heart without a care. They were gone forever; for the touch of love and of pain had been laid on her; and never again would her radiant eyes smile cloudlessly like the young eagle's at a sun that rose but to be greeted as only youth can greet another dawn of life that is without a shadow.

And she leaned wearily there with her cheek lying on the cold gray Moorish stone; the color and the brightness were in the rays of the light, in the rich hues of her hair and her mouth, in the scarlet glow of her dress: there was no brightness in her face. The eyes were vacant as they watched the green lizard glide over the wall beyond, and the lips were parted with a look of unspeakable fatigue; the tire, not of the limbs, but of the heart. She had come thither hoping to leave behind her on the desert wind that alien care, that new strange passion, which sapped her strength, and stung her pride, and made her evil with such murderous lust of vengeance; and they were with her still. Only something of the deadly biting ferocity of jealousy had changed into a passionate longing to be as that woman was who had his love; into a certain hopeless sickening sense of having forever lost that which alone could have given her such beauty and such honor in the sight of men as those this woman had.

To her it seemed impossible that this patrician who had his passion should not return it. To the child of the camp, though she often mocked at caste, all the inexorable rules, all the reticent instincts of caste, were things unknown. She would have thought love could have bridged over any gulf; she would have failed to comprehend all the thousand reasons which would have forbidden any bond between the great aristocrat and a man of low grade and of dubious name. She only thought of love as she had always seen it, quickly born, hotly cherished, wildly indulged, and without tie or restraint.

"And I came without my vengeance!" she mused. To the nature that felt the ferocity of the *vendetta* a right and a due, there was wounding humiliation in her knowledge that she had left her rival unharmed, and

had come hither, out from his sight and his presence, lest he should see in her one glimpse of that folly which she would have killed herself under her own steel rather than have been betrayed either for his contempt or his compassion.

"And I came without my vengeance!" she mused: in that oppressive noon, in that gray and lonely place, in that lofty tower-solitude, where there was nothing between her and the hot, hard, cruel blue of the heavens, vengeance looked the only thing that was left her, the only means whereby that void in her heart could be filled, that shame in her life be washed out. To love! and to love a man who had no love for her, whose eyes only beheld another's face, whose ears only thirsted for another's voice! Its degradation stamped her a traitress in her own sight—traitress to her code, to her pride, to her country, to her flag!

And yet at the core of her heart so tired a pang was aching! She who had gloried in being the child of the whole people, the daughter of the whole army, felt lonely and abandoned, as though she were some bird which an hour ago had been flying in all its joy among its brethren, and now, maimed with one shot, had fallen with broken pinion and torn plumage to lie alone upon the sand and die.

The touch of a bird's wing brushing her hair brought the dreamy comparison to her wandering thoughts. She started and lifted her head; it was a blue carrier-pigeon, one of the many she fed at that casement, and the swiftest and surest of several she sent with messages for the soldiers between the various stations and corps. She had forgotten she had left the bird at the encampment.

She caressed it absently, while the tired creature sank down on her bosom; then only she saw that there

was a letter beneath one wing. She unloosed it, and looked at it without being able to tell its meaning; she could not read a word, printed or written. Military habits were too strong with her for the arrival not to change her reverie into action; whoever it was for, it must be seen. She gave the pigeon water and grain, then wound her way down the dark, narrow stairs, through the height of the tower, out into the passage below.

She found an old French cobbler sitting at a stall in a casement stitching leather; he was her customary reader and scribe in this quarter. She touched him with the paper. "Bon Mathieu! wilt thou read this to me?"

"It is for thee, Little One, and signed 'Petit Pot-de-terre.'"

Cigarette nodded listlessly.

"'Tis a good lad, and a scholar," she answered, absently. "Read on!"

And he read, aloud:

"There is ill news. I send the bird on a chance to find thee. Bel-à-faire-peur struck the Black Hawk—a light blow, but with threat to kill following it. He has been tried, and is to be shot. There is no appeal to the Conseil de Révision. The case is clear; the Colonel could have cut him down, were that all. I thought you should know. We are all sorry. It was done on the night of the great fête. I am thy humble lover and slave."

So the boy Zouave's scrawl, crushed, and blotted, and written with great difficulty, ran in its brief phrases that the slow muttering of the old shoemaker drew out in tedious length.

Cigarette heard; she never made a movement or gave a sound, but all the blood fled out of her brilliant

face, leaving it horribly blanched beneath its brown sun-scorch; and her eyes, distended, senseless, sightless, were fastened on the old man's slowly moving mouth.

"Read it again!" she said, simply, when all was ended. He started, and looked up at her face: the voice had not one accent of its own tones left.

He obeyed, and read it once more to the end. Then a loud shuddering sigh escaped her, like the breath of one stifling under flames.

"Shot!" she said, vacantly. "Shot!"

Her vengeance had come without her once lifting her hand to summon it.

The old man rose hurriedly.

"Child! art thou ill?"

"The blow was struck for *her!*" she muttered. "It was that night, you hear—that night?"

"What night? Thou lookest so strangely! Dost thou love this doomed soldier?"

Cigarette laughed—a laugh whose echo thrilled horribly through the lonely Moresco courtway.

"Love? love? I hated him, look you! So I said. And I longed for my vengeance. It is come!"

She was still a moment; her white, parched mouth quivering as though she were under physical torture, her strained eyes fastened on the empty air, the veins in her throat swelling and throbbing till they glowed to purple. Then she crushed the letter in one hand, and flew, fleet as any antelope, through the streets of the Moorish quarter, and across the city to the quay.

The people ever gave way before her; but now they scattered like frightened sheep from her path. There was something that terrified them in that bloodless horror set upon her face, and in that fury of resistless speed with which she rushed upon her way.

Once only in her headlong career through the throngs she paused; it was as one face, on which the strong light of the noontide poured, came before her. The senseless look changed in her eyes; she wheeled out of her route, and stopped before the man who had thus arrested her. He was leaning idly over the stall of a Turkish bazaar, and her hand grasped his arm before he saw her.

"You have his face," she muttered. "What are you to him?"

He made no answer; he was too amazed.

"You are of his race," she persisted. "You are brethren, by your look. What are you to him?"

"To whom?"

"To the man who calls himself Louis Victor; a Chasseur of my army."

Her eyes were fastened entirely on him; keen, ruthless, fierce, in this moment, as a hawk's. He grew pale, and murmured an incoherent denial. He sought to shake her off, first gently, then more rudely; he called her mad, and tried to fling her from him; but the lithe fingers only wound themselves closer on his arm.

"Be still—fool!" she muttered; and there was that in the accent that lent a strange force and dignity in that moment to the careless and mischievous plaything of the soldiery—force that overcame him, dignity that overawed him. "You are of his people; you have his eyes, and his look, and his features. He disowns you, or you him. No matter which. He is of your blood; and he lies under sentence of death: do you know that?"

With a stifled cry, the other recoiled from her; he never doubted that she spoke the truth, none could who had looked upon her face.

"Do not lie to *me*," she said curtly. "It avails you nothing. Read that."

She thrust before him the paper the pigeon had brought; his hand trembled sorely as he held it: he believed in that moment that this strange creature, half soldier, half woman, half brigand, half child, knew all his story and all his shame from his brother:

"Shot!" he echoed hoarsely, as she had done, when he had read on to the end. "Shot! O my God! and I——"

She drew him out of the thoroughfare into a dark recess within the bazaar; he submitted unresistingly; he was filled with the horror, the remorse, the overwhelming shock of his brother's doom.

"He will be shot," she said with a strange calmness. "We shoot down many men in our army. I know him well. He was justified in his act, I do not doubt; but discipline will not stay for that——"

"Silence, for mercy's sake! Is there no hope—no possibility?"

Her lips were parched like the desert sand as her dry hard words came through them. "None. His chief could have cut him down on the instant. It took place in camp. You feel this thing; you are of his race, then?"

"I am his brother!"

She was silent; looking at him fixedly, it did not seem to her strange that she should thus have met one of his blood in the crowds of Algiers. She was absorbed in the one catastrophe whose hideousness seemed to eat her very life away, even while her nerve, and her brain, and her courage remained at their keenest and strongest.

"You are his brother," she said slowly, so much as an affirmation that his belief was confirmed that she had

learned both their relationship and their history from Cecil. "You must go to him, then."

He shook from head to foot.

"Yes, yes! But it will be too late!"

She did not know that the words were cried out in all the contrition of an unavailing remorse; she gave them only their literal significance, and shuddered as she answered him:

"That you must risk. You must go to him. But, first, I must know more. Tell me his name, his rank."

He was silent: coward and egotist though he was, both cowardice and egotism were killed in him under the overwhelming horror with which he felt himself as truly by moral guilt a fratricide as though he had stabbed his elder through the heart.

"Speak!" hissed Cigarette through her clinched teeth. "If you have any kindness, any pity, any love for the man of your blood, who will be shot there like a dog, do not waste a second—answer me, tell me all."

He turned his wild terrified glance upon her: he had in that moment no sense but to seize some means of reparation, to declare his brother's rights, to cry out to the very stones of the streets his own wrong and his victim's sacrifice.

"He is the head of my house!" he answered her, scarce knowing what he answered. "He should bear the title that I bear now. He is here, in this misery, because he is the most merciful, the most generous, the most long-suffering of living souls! If he die, it is not they who have killed him; it is I!"

She listened, with her face set in that stern, fixed, resolute command which never varied: she neglected all that wonder, or curiosity, or interest would have made her as at any other time, she only heeded the few great facts that bore upon the fate of the condemned.

"Settle with yourself for that sin," she said bitterly. "*Your* remorse will not save him. But do the thing that I bid you, if that remorse be sincere. Write me out here that title you say he should bear, and your statement that he is your brother, and should be the chief of your house; then sign it, and give it to me."

He seized her hands, and gazed with imploring eyes into her face.

"Who are you? What are you? If you have the power to do it, for the love of God rescue him! It is I who have murdered him—I—who have let him live on in this hell for my sake!"

"For your sake!"

She flung his hands off her and looked him full in the face; that glance of the speechless scorn, the unutterable rebuke of the woman-child who would herself have died a thousand deaths rather than have purchased a whole existence by a single falsehood or a single cowardice, smote him like a blow, and avenged his sin more absolutely than any public chastisement. The courage and the truth of a girl scorned his timorous fear and his living lie. His head sank, he seemed to shrink under her gaze; his act had never looked so vile to him as it looked now.

She gazed a moment longer at him with her mute and wondering disdain that there should be on earth a male life capable of such fear and of such ignominy as these. Then the strong and rapid power in her took its instant ascendency over the weaker nature.

"Monsieur, I do not know your story; I do not want. I am not used to men who let others suffer for them. What I want is your written statement of your brother's name and station; give it me."

He made a gesture of consent; he would have signed away his soul, if he could, in the stupor of remorse

which had seized him. She brought him pens and paper from the Turk's store, and dictated what he wrote:

"*I hereby affirm that the person serving in the Chasseurs d'Afrique under the name of Louis Victor is my elder brother, Bertie Cecil, lawfully, by inheritance, the Viscount Royallieu, Peer of England. I hereby also acknowledge that I have succeeded to and borne the title illegally, under the supposition of his death.*

"(Signed) BERKELEY CECIL."

He wrote it mechanically, the force of her will and the torture of his own conscience driving him, on an impulse, to undo in an instant the whole web of falsehood that he had let circumstance weave on and on to shelter him through twelve long years. He let her draw the paper from him and fold it away in her belt. He watched her with a curious dreamy sense of his own impotence against the fierce and fiery torrent of her bidding.

"What is it you will do?" he asked her.

"The best that shall lie in my power; do you the same."

"Can his life yet be saved?"

"His honor may—his honor shall."

Her face had an exceeding beauty as she spoke; though it was stern and rigid still, a look that was sublime gleamed over it. She, the waif and stray of a dissolute camp, knew better than the scion of his own race how the doomed man would choose the vindication of his honor before the rescue of his life. He laid his hand on her as she moved:

"Stay—stay! One word——"

She flung him off her again:

"This is no time for words. Go to him—*coward!*—and let the balls that kill him reach you, too, if you have one trait of manhood left in you!"

Then, swiftly as a swallow darts, she quitted him and flew on her headlong way, down through the pressure of the people, and the throngs of the marts, and the noise, and the color, and the movement of the streets.

The sun was scarce declined from its noon before she rode out of the city, on a half-bred horse of the Spahis, swift as the antelope and as wild, with her only equipment some pistols in her holsters, and a bag of rice and a skin of water slung at her saddle-bow.

They asked her where she went; she never answered. The hoofs struck sharp echoes out of the rugged stones, and the people were scattered like chaff as she went at full gallop down through Algiers. Her comrades, used to see her ever with some song in the air and some laugh on the lips as she went, looked after her with wonder as she passed them, silent, and with her face white and stern as though the bright brown loveliness of it had been changed to alabaster.

"What is it with the Cigarette?" they asked each other. None could tell; the desert horse and his rider flew by them as a swallow flies. The gleam of her Cross and the colorless calm of the childlike face, that wore the resolve of a Napoléon's on it, were the last they ever saw of Cigarette.

All her fluent untiring speech was gone—gone with the rose hue from her cheek, with the laugh from her mouth, with the child's joyaunce from her heart; but the brave, stanch, dauntless spirit lived with a soldier's courage, with a martyr's patience.

And she rode straight through the scorch of the mid-day sun, along the sea-coast westward. The dizzy swiftness would have blinded most who should have been

carried through the dry air and under the burning skies at that breathless and pauseless speed; but she had ridden half-maddened colts with the skill of Arabs themselves; she had been tossed on a holster from her earliest years, and had clung with an infant's hands in fearless glee to the mane of rough-riders' chargers. She never swerved, she never sickened; she was borne on and on against the hard hot currents of the cleft air with only one sense—that she went so slowly, so slowly, when with every beat of the ringing hoofs one of the few moments of a doomed life fled away!

She had a long route before her; she had many leagues to travel, and there were but four and twenty hours, she knew well, left to the man who was condemned to death. Four and twenty hours left open for appeal—no more—betwixt the delivery and execution of the sentence. That delay was always interpreted by the French Code as a delay extending from the evening of one day to the dawn of the second day following; and some slight interval might then ensue, according as the general in command ordained. But the twenty-four hours was all of which she could be certain; and even of them some must have flown by since the carrier-pigeon had been loosed to her. She could not tell how long he had to live.

There were fifty miles between her and her goal; Abd-el-Kader's horse had once covered that space in three hours, so men of the Army of D'Aumale had told her: she knew what they had done she could do. Once only she paused, to let her horse lie a brief while, and cool his foam-flaked sides, and crop some short sweet grass that grew where a cleft of water ran and made the bare earth green. She sat quite motionless while he rested; she was keenly alive to all that could best save his strength and further her travel; but she

watched him during those few minutes of rest and inaction with a fearful look of hunger in her eyes—the worst hunger—that which craves Time and cannot seize it fast enough. Then she mounted again, and again went on, on her flight.

She swept by cantonments, villages, soldiers on the march, douairs of peaceful Arabs, strings of mules and camels, caravans of merchandise: nothing arrested her; she saw nothing that she passed, as she rode over the hard dust-covered shadowless roads, over the weary sun-scorched monotonous country, over the land without verdure and without foliage, the land that yet has so weird a beauty, so irresistible a fascination; the land to which men, knowing that death waits for them in it, yet return with so mad an infatuation as her lovers went back across the waters to Circe.

The horse was reeking with smoke and foam, and the blood was coursing from his flanks, as she reached her destination at last, and threw herself off his saddle as he sank faint and quivering to the ground. Whither she had come was to a fortress where the Marshal of France, who was the Viceroy of Africa, had arrived that day in his progress of inspection throughout the provinces. Soldiers clustered round her eagerly beneath the gates, and over the fallen beast, a thousand questions pouring from their curious tongues. She pointed to the animal with one hand, to the gaunt pile of stone that bristled with cannon with the other.

"Have a care of him; and lead me to the chief!"

She spoke quietly; but a certain sensation of awe and fear moved those who heard. She was not the Child of the Army whom they knew so well. She was a creature, desperate, hard pressed, mute as death, strong as steel; above all, hunted by despair.

They hesitated to take her message, to do her bid-

ding. The one whom she sought was great and supreme here as a king; they dreaded to approach his staff, to ask his audience.

Cigarette looked at them a moment, then loosened her Cross and held it out to an adjutant standing beneath the gates.

"Take that to the man who gave it me. Tell him Cigarette waits; and with each moment that she waits a soldier's life is lost. Go!"

The adjutant took it, and went. Over and over again she had brought intelligence of an Arab movement, news of a contemplated razzia, warning of an internal revolt, or tidings of an encounter on the plains, that had been of priceless value to the army which she served. It was not lightly that Cigarette's words were ever received when she spoke as she spoke now; nor was it impossible that she now brought to them that which would brook neither delay nor trifling.

She waited patiently; all the iron discipline of military life had never bound her gay and lawless spirit down, but now she was singularly still and mute. Only there gleamed thirstily in her eyes that fearful avarice which begrudges every moment in its flight as never the miser grudged his hoarded gold into the robber's grasp.

A few minutes and the decoration was brought back to her, and her demand granted. She was summoned to the Marshal's presence. She was taken within the casemate of the fortress. It was the ordnance-room, a long vast silent chamber filled with stands of arms, with all the arts and appliances of war brought to their uttermost perfection, and massed in all the resource of a great empire against the sons of the desert, who had nothing to oppose to them save the despair of a perishing nationality and a stifled freedom.

The Marshal, leaning against a brass field-piece, turned to her with a smile in his keen stern eyes.

"You, my young *décorée!* What brings you here?"

She came up to him with her rapid leopard-like grace, and he started as he saw the change upon her features. She was covered with sand and dust, and with the animal's blood-flecked foam. The beating of her heart from the fury of the gallop had drained every hue from her face; her voice was scarcely articulate in its breathless haste as she saluted him:

"Monseigneur, I have come from Algiers since noon——"

"From Algiers!" He and his officers echoed the name of the city in incredulous amaze; they knew how far from them down along the sea-line the white town lay.

"Since noon, to rescue a life—the life of a great soldier, of a guiltless man. He who saved the honor of France at Zaraila is to die the death of a mutineer at dawn!"

"What!—your Chasseur?"

A dusky scarlet fire burned through the pallor of her face; but her eyes never quailed, and the torrent of her eloquence returned under the pangs of shame that were beaten back under the noble instincts of her love.

"Mine!—since he is a soldier of France; yours too by that title. I am come here, from Algiers, to speak the truth in his name, and to save him for his own honor and the honor of my Empire. See here! At noon, I have this paper, sent by a swift pigeon—read it! You see how he is to die, and why. Well, by my Cross, by my Flag, by my France, I swear that not a hair of his head shall be touched, not a drop of blood in his veins shall be shed!"

He looked at her, astonished at the grandeur and the

courage which could come on this child of razzias and revelries, and give to her all the splendor of a fearless command of some young empress. But his face darkened and set sternly as he read the paper; it was the greatest crime in the sight of a proud soldier, this crime against discipline, of the man for whom she pleaded.

"You speak madly," he said, with cold brevity. "The offense merits the chastisement. I shall not attempt to interfere."

"Wait! you will hear, at least, Monseigneur?"

"I will hear you—yes; but I tell you, once for all, I never change sentences that are pronounced by *conseils de guerre;* and this crime is the last for which you should attempt to plead for mercy with me."

"Hear me, at least!" she cried, with passionate ferocity—the ferocity of a dumb animal wounded by a shot. "You do not know what this man is—how he has had to endure; I do. I have watched him; I have seen the brutal tyranny of his chief, who hated him because the soldiers loved him. I have seen his patience, his obedience, his long-suffering beneath insults that would have driven any other to revolt and murder. I have seen him—I have told you how—at Zaraila, thinking never of death or of life, only of our Flag, that he has made his own, and under which he has been forced to lead the life of a galley-slave——"

"The finer soldier he be, the less pardonable his offense."

"That I deny! If he were a dolt, a brute, a thing of wood, as many are, he would have no right to vengeance; as it is, he is a gentleman, a hero, a martyr; may he not forget for one hour that he is a slave? Look you! I have seen him so tried, that I told him—I, who love my army better than any living thing under

the sun—that I would forgive him if he forgot duty and dealt with his tyrant as man to man. And he always held his soul in patience. Why? Not because he feared death—he desired it; but because he loved his comrades, and suffered in peace and in silence lest, through him, they should be led into evil——"

His eyes softened as he heard her; but the inflexibility of his voice never altered.

"It is useless to argue with me," he said, briefly; "I never change a sentence."

"But I say that you *shall!*" As the audacious words were flung forth, she looked him full in the eyes, while her voice rang with its old imperious oratory. "You are a great chief; you are as a monarch here; you hold the gifts and the grandeur of the Empire; but, *because* of that—because you are as France in my eyes—I swear, by the name of France, that you shall see justice done to him; after death, if you cannot in life. Do you know who he is—this man whom his comrades will shoot down at sunrise as they shoot down the murderer and the ravisher in their crimes?"

"He is a rebellious soldier; it is sufficient."

"He is *not!* He is a man who vindicated a woman's honor; he is a man who suffers in a brother's place; he is an aristocrat exiled to a martyrdom; he is a hero who has never been greater than he will be great in his last hour. Read that! What you refuse to justice, and mercy, and courage, and guiltlessness, you will grant, may be, to your Order."

She forced into his hand the written statement of Cecil's name and station. All the hot blood was back in her cheek, all the fiery passion back in her eyes. She lashed this potent ruler with the scourge of her scorn as she had lashed a drunken horde of plunderers with her whip. She was reckless of what she said;

she was conscious only of one thing—the despair that consumed her.

The French Marshal glanced his eye on the fragment, carelessly and coldly. As he saw the words, he started, and read on with wondering eagerness.

"Royallieu!" he muttered—"Royallieu!"

The name was familiar to him; he it was who, when he had murmured, "That man has the seat of the English Guards," as a Chasseur d'Afrique had passed him, had been ignorant that in that Chasseur he saw one whom he had known in many a scene of Court splendor and Parisian pleasure. The years had been many since Cecil and he had met, but not so many but that the name brought memories of friendship with it, and moved him with a strange emotion.

He turned with grave anxiety to Cigarette.

"You speak strangely; how came this in your hands?"

"Thus: the day that you gave me the Cross, I saw Madame la Princesse Corona. I hated her, and I went—no matter! From her I learned that he whom we call Louis Victor was of her rank, was of old friendship with her house, was exiled and nameless, but for some reason unknown to her. She needed to see him; to bid him farewell, so she said. I took the message for her; I sent him to her." Her voice grew husky and savage, but she forced her words on with the reckless sacrifice of self that moved her. "He went to her tent, alone, at night; that was, of course, whence he came when Châteauroy met him. I doubt not the Black Hawk had some foul thing to hint of his visit, and that the blow was struck for her—for her! Well; in the streets of Algiers I saw a man with a face like his own; different, but the same race, look you. I spoke to him; I taxed him. When he found that the

one whom I spoke of was under sentence of death, he grew mad; he cried out that he was his brother, and had murdered him—that it was for his sake that the cruelty of this exile had been borne—that if his brother perished, he would be his destroyer. Then I bade him write down that paper, since these English names were unknown to me, and I brought it hither to you that you might see under his hand and with your own eyes that I have uttered the truth. And now is that man to be killed like a mad beast whom you fear? Is that death the reward France will give for Zaraila?"

Her eyes were fixed with a fearful intensity of appeal upon the stern face bent over her; her last arrow was sped; if this failed, all was over. As he heard, he was visibly moved; he remembered the felon's shame that in years gone by had fallen across the banished name of Bertie Cecil; the history seemed clear as crystal to him seen beneath the light shed on it from other days.

His hand fell heavily on the gun-carriage.

"*Mort de Dieu!* it was his brother's sin, not his!"

There was a long silence; those present, who knew nothing of all that was in his memory, felt instinctively that some dead weight of alien guilt was lifted off a blameless life forever.

She drew a deep, long, sighing breath; she knew that he was safe. Her hands unconsciously locked on the great chief's arms; her eyes looked up, senselessly in their rapture and their dread, to his.

"Quick, quick!" she gasped. "The hours go so fast; while we speak here he——"

The words died in her throat. The Marshal swung around with a rapid sign to a staff officer.

"Pens and ink! instantly! My brave child, what can we say to you? I will send an aid to arrest the execution of the sentence. It must be deferred till we

know the whole truth of this; if it be as it looks now, he shall be saved if the Empire can save him!"

She looked up in his eyes with a look that froze his very heart.

"His honor!" she muttered; "his honor—if not his life!"

He understood her; he bowed his haughty head low down to hers.

"True. We will cleanse that, if all other justice be too late."

The answer was infinitely gentle, infinitely solemn. Then he turned and wrote his hurried order, and bade his aid go with it without a second's loss; but Cigarette caught it from his hand.

"To me! to me! No other will go so fast!"

"But, my child, you are worn out already."

She turned on him her beautiful wild eyes, in which the blinding passionate tears were floating.

"Do you think I would tarry for *that?* Ah! I wish that I had let them tell me of God, that I might ask Him now to bless you! Quick, quick! Lend me your swiftest horse, one that will not tire. And send a second order by your aid-de-camp; the Arabs may kill me as I go, and then they will not know!"

He stooped and touched her little brown, scorched, feverish hand with reverence.

"My child, Africa has shown me much heroism, but none like yours. If you fall, *he* shall be safe, and France will know how to avenge its darling's loss."

She turned and gave him one look, infinitely sweet, infinitely eloquent.

"Ah, France!" she said, so softly that the last word was but a sigh of unutterable tenderness. The old imperishable early love was not dethroned; it was there still before all else. France was without rival with her.

Then, without another second's pause, she flew from them, and vaulting into the saddle of a young horse which stood without in the court-yard, rode once more, at full speed, out into the pitiless blaze of the sun, out to the wasted desolation of the plains.

The order of release, indeed, was in her bosom; but the chances were as a million to one that she would reach him with it in time, ere with the rising of the sun his life would have set forever.

All the horror of remorse was on her; to her nature the bitter jealousy in which she had desired vengeance on him seemed to have rendered her a murderess. She loved him—loved him with an exceeding passion; and only in this extremity, when it was confronted with the imminence of death, did the fullness and the greatness of that love make their way out of the petulant pride and the wounded vanity which had obscured them. She had been ere now a child and a hero; beneath this blow which struck at him she changed—she became a woman and a martyr.

And she rode at full speed through the night, as she had done through the daylight, her eyes glancing all around in the keen instinct of a trooper, her hand always on the butt of her belt pistol. For she knew well what the danger was of these lonely, unguarded, untraveled leagues that yawned in so vast a distance between her and her goal. The Arabs, beaten, but only rendered furious by defeat, swept down on to those plains with the old guerrilla skill, the old marvelous rapidity. She knew that with every second shot or steel might send her reeling from her saddle, that with every moment she might be surrounded by some desperate band who would spare neither her sex nor her youth. But that intoxication of peril, the wine-draught she had drunk from her infancy, was all which

sustained her in that race with death. It filled her veins with their old heat, her heart with its old daring, her nerves with their old matchless courage; but for it she would have dropped, heart-sick with terror and despair, ere her errand could be done; under it she had the coolness, the keenness, the sagacity, the sustained force, and the supernatural strength of some young hunted animal. They might slay her so that she left perforce her mission unaccomplished; but no dread of such a fate had even an instant's power to appall her or arrest her. While there should be breath in her, she would go on to the end.

There were eight hours' hard riding before her, at the swiftest pace her horse could make; and she was already worn by the leagues already traversed. Although this was nothing new that she did now, yet as time flew on and she flew with it ceaselessly, through the dim solitary barren moonlit land, her brain now and then grew giddy, her heart now and then stood still with a sudden numbing faintness. She shook the weakness off her with the resolute scorn for it of her nature, and succeeded in its banishment. They had put in her hand as she had passed through the fortress gates a lance with a lantern muffled in Arab fashion, so that the light was unseen from before, while it streamed over her herself, to enable her to guide her way if the moon should be veiled by clouds. With that single starry gleam aslant on a level with her eyes, she rode through the ghastly twilight of the half-lit plains, now flooded with luster as the moon emerged, now engulfed in darkness as the stormy western winds drove the cirri over it. But neither darkness nor light differed to her; she noted neither; she was like one drunk with strong wine, and she had but one dread—that the power of her horse would give way under the unnatural strain made on it,

and that she would reach too late, when the life she went to save would have fallen forever, silent unto death, as she had seen the life of Marquise *fall*.

Hour on hour, league on league, passed away; she felt the animal quiver under the spur, and she heard the catch in his panting breath as he strained to give his fleetest and best, that told her how, ere long, the racing speed, the extended gallop at which she kept him, would tell, and beat him down despite his desert strain. She had no pity; she would have killed twenty horses under her to reach her goal. She was giving her own life, she was willing to lose it, if by its loss she did this thing, to save even the man condemned to die with the rising of the sun. She did not spare herself; and she would have spared no living thing, to fulfill the mission that she undertook. She loved with the passionate blindness of her sex, with the absolute abandonment of the southern blood. If to spare him she must have bidden thousands fall, she would have given the word for their destruction without a moment's pause.

Once from some screen of gaunt and barren rock a shot was fired at her, and flew within a hair's breadth of her brain; she never even looked around to see whence it had come; she knew it was from some Arab prowler of the plains. Her single spark of light through the half-veiled lantern passed as swiftly as a shooting-star across the plateau. And as she felt the hours steal on—so fast, so hideously fast—with that horrible relentlessness, "ohne hast, ohne rast," which tarries for no despair, as it hastens for no desire, her lips grew dry as dust, her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, the blood beat like a thousand hammers on her brain.

What she dreaded came.

Midway in her course, when, by the stars, she knew midnight was passed, the animal strained with hard-

drawn panting gasps to answer the demand made on him by the spur and by the lance-shaft with which he was goaded onward. In the lantern-light she saw his head stretched out in the racing agony, his distended eyeballs, his neck covered with foam and blood, his heaving flanks that seem bursting with every throb that his heart gave; she knew that, half a league more forced from him, he would drop like a dead thing never to rise again. She let the bridle drop upon the poor beast's neck, and threw her arms above her head with a shrill wailing cry, whose despair echoed over the noiseless plains like the cry of a shot-stricken animal. She saw it all: the breathing of the rosy golden day; the stillness of the hushed camp; the tread of the few picked men; the open coffin by the open grave; the leveled carbines gleaming in the first rays of the sun. . . . She had seen it so many times—seen it, to the awful end, when the living man fell down in the morning light a shattered, senseless, soulless, crushed-out mass.

That single moment was all the soldier's nature in her gave to the abandonment of despair, to the paralysis that seized her. With that one cry from the depths of her breaking heart, the weakness spent itself: she knew that action alone could aid him. She looked across, southward and northward, east and west, to see if there were aught near from which she could get aid. If there were none, the horse must drop down to die, and with his life the other life would perish as surely as the sun would rise.

Her gaze, straining through the darkness, broken here and there by fitful gleams of moonlight, caught sight in the distance of some yet darker thing, moving rapidly —a large cloud skimming the earth. She let the horse, which had paused the instant the bridle had touched his neck, stand still awhile, and kept her eyes fixed on the

advancing cloud till, with the marvelous surety of her desert-trained vision, she disentangled it from the floating mists and wavering shadows, and recognized it, as it was, a band of Arabs.

If she turned eastward out of her route, the failing strength of her horse would be fully enough to take her into safety from their pursuit, or even from their perception, for they were coming straightly and swiftly across the plain. If she were seen by them, she was certain of her fate; they could only be the desperate remnant of the decimated tribes, the foraging raiders of starving and desperate men, hunted from refuge to refuge, and carrying fire and sword in their vengeance wherever an unprotected caravan or a defenseless settlement gave them the power of plunder and of slaughter, that spared neither age nor sex. She was known throughout the length and the breadth of the land to the Arabs: she was neither child nor woman to them; she was but the soldier who had brought up the French reserve at Zaraila; she was but the foe who had seen them defeated, and ridden down with her comrades in their pursuit in twice a score of vanquished, bitter, intolerably shameful days. Some among them had sworn by their God to put her to a fearful death if ever they made her captive, for they held her in superstitious awe, and thought the spell of the Frankish successes would be broken if she were slain. She knew that; yet, knowing it, she looked at their advancing band one moment, then turned her horse's head and rode straight toward them.

"They will kill me, but that may save him," she thought. "Any other way he is lost."

So she rode directly toward them: rode so that she crossed their front, and placed herself in their path, standing quite still, with the cloth torn from the lantern, so that its light fell full about her, as she held it above

her head. In an instant they knew her. They were the remnant who had escaped from the carnage of Zaraila; they knew her with all the rapid unerring surety of hate. They gave the shrill wild war-shout of their tribe, and the whole mass of gaunt, dark, mounted figures with their weapons whirling round their heads inclosed her; a cloud of kites settled down with their black wings and cruel beaks upon one young silvery-plumed gerfalcon.

She sat unmoved, and looked up at the naked blades that flashed above her: there was no fear upon her face, only a calm resolute proud beauty, very pale, very still in the light that gleamed on it from the lantern rays.

"I surrender," she said briefly: she had never thought to say these words of submission to her scorned foes; she would not have been brought to utter them to spare her own existence. Their answer was a yell of furious delight, and their bare blades smote each other with a clash of brutal joy: they had her, the Frankish child who had brought shame and destruction on them at Zaraila, and they longed to draw their steel across the fair young throat, to plunge their lances into the bright bare bosom, to twine her hair round their spear handles, to rend her delicate limbs apart, as a tiger rends the antelope, to torture, to outrage, to wreak their vengeance on her. Their chief, only, motioned their violence back from her, and bade them leave her untouched. At him she looked, still with the same fixed, serene, scornful resolve: she had encountered these men so often in battle, she knew so well how rich a prize she was to him. But she had one thought alone with her; and for it she subdued contempt, and hate, and pride and every passion in her.

"I surrender," she said, with the same tranquillity. "I have heard that you have sworn by your God and

your Prophet to tear me limb from limb because that I —a child, and a woman-child—brought you to shame and to grief on the day of Zaraila. Well, I am here; do it. You can slake your will on me. But that you are brave men, and that I have ever met you in fair fight, let me speak one word with you first."

Through the menaces and the rage around her, fierce as the yelling of starving wolves around a frozen corpse, her clear brave tones reached the ear of the chief in the linguasabir that she used. He was a young man, and his ear was caught by that tuneful voice, his eyes by that youthful face. He signed upward the swords of his followers, and motioned them back as their arms were stretched to seize her, and their shouts clamored for her slaughter.

"Speak on," he said, briefly to her.

"You have sworn to take my body, sawn in two, to Ben-Ihreddin?" she pursued, naming the Arab leader whom her Spahis had driven off the field of Zaraila. "Well, here it is; you can take it to him; and you will receive the piasters, and the horse, and the arms that he has promised to whomsoever shall slay me. I have surrendered; I am yours. But you are bold men, and the bold are never mean; therefore I will ask one thing of you. There is a man yonder, in my camp, condemned to death with the dawn. He is innocent. I have ridden from Algiers to-day with the order of his release. If it is not there by sunrise he will be shot; and he is guiltless as a child unborn. My horse is worn out; he could not go another half league. I knew that, since he had failed, my comrade would perish, unless I found a fresh beast or a messenger to go in my stead. I saw your band come across the plain. I knew that you would kill me, because of your oath and of your Emir's bribe; but I thought that you

would have greatness enough in you to save this man who is condemned, without crime, and who must perish unless you, his foes, have pity on him. Therefore I came. Take the paper that frees him; send your fleetest and surest with it, under a flag of truce, into our camp by the dawn, let him tell them there that I, Cigarette, gave it him—he must say no word of what you have done to me, or his white flag will not protect him from the vengeance of my army—and then receive your reward from your chief, Ben-Ihreddin, when you lay my head down for his horse's hoofs to trample into the dust. Answer me—is the compact fair? Ride on with this paper, and then kill me with what torments you choose."

She spoke with calm unwavering resolve, meaning that which she uttered to its very uttermost letter. She knew that these men had thirsted for her blood, she offered it to be shed to gain for him that messenger on whose speed his life was hanging, she knew that a price was set upon her head, but she delivered herself over to the hands of her enemies so that thereby she might purchase his redemption.

As they heard, silence fell upon the brutal clamorous herd around—the silence of amaze and of respect. The young chief listened gravely; by the glistening of his keen black eyes, he was surprised and moved, though, true to his teaching, he showed neither emotion as he answered her:

"Who is this Frank for whom you do this thing?"

"He is the warrior to whom you offered life on the field of Zaraila because his courage was as the courage of gods."

She knew the qualities of the desert character; knew how to appeal to its reverence and to its chivalry.

"And for what does he perish?" he asked.

"Because he forgot for once that he was a slave; and because he has borne the burden of a guilt that was not his own."

They were quite still now, closed around her; these ferocious plunderers, who had been thirsty a moment before to sneathe their weapons in her body, were spell-bound by the sympathy of courageous souls, by some vague perception that there was a greatness in this little tigress of France, whom they had sworn to hunt down and slaughter, which surpassed all they had known or dreamed.

"And you have given yourself up to us that by your death you may purchase a messenger from us for this errand?" pursued their leader. He had been reared as a boy in the high tenets and the pure chivalries of the school of Abd-el-Kader; and they were not lost in him, despite the crimes and the desperation of his life.

She held the paper out to him with a passionate entreaty breaking through the enforced calm of despair with which she had hitherto spoken.

"Cut me in ten thousand pieces with your swords, but save *him*, as you are brave men, as you are generous foes!"

With a single sign of his hand, their leader waved them back where they crowded around her, and leaped down from his saddle, and led the horse he had dismounted to her.

"Maiden," he said, gently, "we are Arabs, but we are not brutes. We swore to avenge ourselves on an enemy; we are not vile enough to accept a martyrdom. Take my horse—he is the swiftest of my troop—and go you on your errand; you are safe from me."

She looked at him in stupor; the sense of his words was not tangible to her; she had had no hope, no thought, that they would ever deal thus with her; all she had

ever dreamed of was so to touch their hearts and their generosity that they would spare one from among their troop to do the errand of mercy she had begged of them.

"You play with me!" she murmured, while her lips grew whiter and her great eyes larger in the intensity of her emotion. "Ah! for pity's sake, make haste and kill me, so that this only may reach him!"

The chief, standing by her, lifted her up in his sinewy arms, up on to the saddle of his charger. His voice was very solemn, his glance was very gentle; all the nobility of the highest Arab nature was aroused in him at the heroism of a child, a girl, an infidel—one, in his sight, abandoned and shameful among her sex.

"Go in peace," he said, simply; "it is not with such as thee that we war."

Then, and then only, as she felt the fresh reins placed in her hand, and saw the ruthless horde around her fall back and leave her free, did she understand his meaning, did she comprehend that he gave her back both liberty and life, and, with the surrender of the horse he loved, the noblest and most precious gift that the Arab ever bestows or ever receives. The unutterable joy seemed to blind her, and gleam upon her face like the blazing light of noon, as she turned her burning eyes full on him.

"Ah! now I believe that thine Allah rules thee, equally with Christians! If I live, thou shalt see me back ere another night; if I die, France will know how to thank thee!"

"We do not do the thing that is right for the sake that men may recompense us," he answered her, gently. "Fly to thy friend, and hereafter do not judge that those who are in arms against thee must needs be as the brutes that seek out whom they shall devour."

Then, with one word in his own tongue, he bade the horse bear her southward, and, as swiftly as a spear launched from his hand, the animal obeyed him and flew across the plains. He looked after her awhile, through the dim tremulous darkness that seemed cleft by the rush of the gallop as the clouds are cleft by lightning, while his tribe sat silent on their horses in moody unwilling consent, savage in that they had been deprived of prey, moved in that they were sensible of this martyrdom which had been offered to them.

"Verily the courage of a woman has put the best among us unto shame," he said, rather to himself than them, as he mounted the stallion brought him from the rear and rode slowly northward, unconscious that the thing he had done was great, because conscious only that it was just.

And, borne by the fleetness of the desert-bred beast, she went away through the heavy bronze-hued dullness of the night. Her brain had no sense, her hands had no feeling, her eyes had no sight; the rushing as of waters was loud on her ears, the giddiness of fasting and of fatigue sent the gloom eddying round and round like a whirlpool of shadow. Yet she had remembrance enough left to ride on, and on, and on without once flinching from the agonies that racked her cramped limbs and throbbed in her beating temples; she had remembrance enough to strain her blind eyes toward the east and murmur, in her terror of that white dawn, that must soon break, the only prayer that had been ever uttered by the lips no mother's kiss had ever touched:

"*O God! keep the day back!*"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN THE MIDST OF HER ARMY.

THERE was a line of light in the eastern sky. The camp was very still. It was the hour for the mounting of the guard, and, as the light spread higher and higher, whiter and whiter, as the morning came, a score of men advanced slowly and in silence to a broad strip of land screened from the great encampment by the rise and fall of the ground, and stretching far and even, with only here and there a single palm to break its surface, over which the immense arc of the sky bent, gray and serene, with only the one colorless gleam eastward that was changing imperceptibly into the warm red flush of opening day.

Sunrise and solitude: they were alike chosen lest the army that honored, the comrades that loved him should rise to his rescue, casting off the yoke of discipline, and remembering only that tyranny and that wretchedness under which they had seen him patient and unmoved throughout so many years of servitude.

He stood tranquil beside the coffin within which his broken limbs and shot-pierced corpse would so soon be laid forever. There was a deep sadness on his face, but it was perfectly serene. To the words of the priest who approached him he listened with respect, though he gently declined the services of the Church. He had spoken but very little since his arrest; he was led out of the camp in silence, and waited in silence now, looking across the plains to where the dawn was growing richer and brighter with every moment that the

numbered seconds of his life drifted slowly and surely away.

When they came near to bind the covering over his eyes he motioned them away, taking the bandage from their hands and casting it far from him.

"Did I ever fear to look down the depths of my enemies' muskets?"

It was the single outbreak, the single reproach, that escaped from him—the single utterance by which he ever quoted his services to France. Not one who heard him dared again force on him that indignity which would have blinded his sight, as though he had ever dreaded to meet death.

That one protest having escaped from him, he was once more still and calm, as though the vacant grave yawning at his feet had been but a couch of down to rest his tired limbs. His eyes watched the daylight deepen, and widen, and grow into one sheet of glowing roseate warmth; but there was no regret in the gaze; there was a fixed fathomless resignation that moved with a vague sense of awe those who had come to slay him, and who had been so used to slaughter that they fired their volley into their comrade's breast as callously as into the ranks of their antagonists.

"It is best thus," he thought, "if only she never knows——"

Over the slope of brown and barren earth that screened the camp from view there came, at the very moment that the ramrods were drawn out with a shrill, sharp ring from the carbine-barrels, a single figure, tall, stalwart, lithe, with the spring of the deerstalker in its rapid step, and the sinew of the northern races in its mould.

Cecil never saw it; he was looking at the east, at the deepening of the morning flush that was the signal of his slaughter, and his head was turned away.

The new-comer went straight to the adjutant in command, and addressed him with brief preface, hurriedly and low.

"Your prisoner is Victor of the Chasseurs?—he is to be shot this morning?"

The officer assented; he suffered the interruption, recognizing the rank of the speaker.

"I heard of it yesterday; I rode all night from Oran. I feel great pity for this man, though he is unknown to me," the stranger pursued, in rapid whispered words. "His crime was——"

"A blow to his colonel, monseigneur."

"And there is no possibility of a reprieve?"

"None."

"May I speak with him an instant? I have heard it thought that he is of my country, and of a rank above his standing in his regiment here."

"You may address him, M. le Duc; but be brief. Time presses."

He thanked the officer for the unusual permission, and turned to approach the prisoner. At that moment Cecil turned also, and their eyes met. A great shuddering cry broke from them both; his head sank as though the bullets had already pierced his breast, and the man who believed him dead stood gazing at him, paralyzed with horror.

For a moment there was an awful silence; then the Seraph's voice rang out with a terror in it that thrilled through the careless, callous hearts of the watching soldiery.

"Who is that man? *He* died—he died so long ago! And yet——"

Cecil's head was sunk on his chest; he never spoke, he never moved; he knew the helpless, hopeless misery that waited for the one who found him living only to

find him also standing beside his open grave. He saw nothing; he only felt the crushing force of his friend's arms flung round him, as though seizing him to learn whether he were a living man or a specter dreamed of in delirium.

"*Who are you?* Answer me for pity's sake!"

As the swift, hoarse, incredulous words poured on his ear, he, not seeking to unloose the other's hold, lifted his head and looked full in the eyes that had not met his own for twelve long years. In that one look all was uttered; the strained, eager, doubting eyes that read their answer in it needed no other.

"You live still! Oh! thank God—thank God!"

And as the thanksgiving escaped him, he forgot all save the breathless joy of this resurrection; forgot that at their feet the yawning grave was open and unfilled. Then, and only then, under that recognition of the friendship that had never failed and never doubted, the courage of the condemned gave way, and his limbs shook with a great shiver of intolerable torture; and at the look that came upon his face, the look of dumb, brute-like anguish, the man who loved him remembered all—remembered that he stood there in the morning light only to be shot down like a beast of prey. Holding him there still with that strong pressure of his sinewy hands, he swore a great oath that rolled like thunder down the hard, keen air.

"*You!* perishing here! If they send their shots through *you*, they shall reach me first in their passage! O heaven! Why have you lived like this? Why have you been lost to *me*, if you were dead to all the world beside?"

They were the words that his sister had spoken; Cecil's white lips quivered as he heard them; his voice was scarcely audible as it panted through them.

"I was accused——"

"Ay! But by whom? Not by me. Never by me!"

Cecil's eyes filled with slow blinding tears; tears sweet as a woman's in her joy, bitter as a man's in his agony. He knew that in this one heart at least no base suspicion ever had harbored; he knew that this love, at least, had cleaved to him through all shame and against all evil.

"God reward you," he murmured. "You have never doubted?"

"Doubted? Was your honor not as my own?"

"I can die at peace then; you know me guiltless——"

"Great God! Death shall not touch you. As I stand here not a hair of your head shall be harmed——"

"Hush! Justice must take its course. One thing only—has *she* heard?"

"Nothing. She has left Africa. But you can be saved; you *shall* be saved; they do not know what they do!"

"Yes! They but follow the sentence of the law. Do not regret it. It is best thus."

"Best!—that you should be slaughtered in cold blood!" his voice was hoarse with the horror which, despite his words, possessed him. He knew what the demands of discipline exacted, he knew what the inexorable tyranny of the army enforced, he knew that he had found the life lost to him for so long only to stand by and see it struck down like a shot stag's.

Cecil's eyes looked at him with a regard in which all the sacrifice, all the patience, all the martyrdom of his life spoke.

"Best, because a lie I could never speak to you, and the truth I can never tell to you. Do not let her know;

it might give her pain. I have loved her; that is useless, like all the rest. Give me your hand once more, and then—let them do their duty. Turn your head away; it will soon be over!"

Almost ere he asked it, his friend's hands closed upon both his own, keeping the promise made so long before in the old years gone: great tearless sobs heaved the depths of his broad chest; those gentle weary words had rent his very soul, and he knew that he was powerless here; he knew that he could no more stay this doom of death than he could stay the rising of the sun up over the eastern heavens. The clear voice of the officer in command rang shrilly through the stillness.

"Monseigneur, make your farewell. I can wait no longer."

The Seraph started, and flung himself round with the grand challenge of a lion, struck by a puny spear; his face flushed crimson; his words were choked in his throbbing throat.

"As I live, you shall not fire! I forbid you! I swear by my honor and the honor of England that he shall not die like a dog. He is of my country; he is of my order. I will appeal to your Emperor; he will accord me his life the instant I ask it. Give me only an hour's reprieve—a few moments' space to speak to your chiefs, to seek out your general——"

"It is impossible, monseigneur."

The curt, calm answer was inflexible: against the sentence and its execution there could be no appeal.

Cecil laid his hand upon his old friend's shoulders.

"It will be useless," he murmured. "Let them act; the quicker the better."

"What! you think I can look on, and see you die?"

"Would to Heaven you had never known I lived——"

The officer made a gesture to the guard to separate them.

"Monsieur, submit to the execution of the law, or I must arrest you."

Lyonnesse flung off the detaining hand of the guard, and swung round so that his agonized eyes gazed close into the adjutant's immovable face, which before that gaze lost its coldness and its rigor, and changed to a great pity for this stranger who had found the friend of his youth in the man who stood condemned to perish there.

"An hour's reprieve; for mercy's sake, grant that!"

"I have said, it is impossible."

"But you do not dream who is——"

"It matters not."

"He is an English noble, I tell you——"

"He is a soldier who has broken the law; that suffices."

"O Heaven! have you no humanity?"

"We have justice."

"Justice! If you have justice, let your chiefs hear his story; let his name be made known; give me an hour's space to plead for him. Your Emperor would grant me his life, were he here; yield me an hour—a half hour—anything that will give me time to serve him——"

"It is out of the question; I must obey my orders. I regret you should have this pain; but if you do not cease to interfere, my soldiers must make you."

Where the guards held him, Cecil saw and heard. His voice rose with all its old strength and sweetness:

"My friend, do not plead for me. For the sake of our common country and our old love, let us both meet this with silence and with courage."

"You are a madman!" cried the man, whose heart

felt breaking under this doom he could neither avert nor share. "You think that they shall kill you before my eyes?—you think I shall stand by to see you murdered? What crime have you done? None, I dare swear, save being moved, under insult, to act as the men of your race ever acted! Ah, God! why have you lived as you have done? why not have trusted my faith and my love? If you had believed in my faith as I believed in your innocence, this misery never had come to us!"

"Hush! hush! or you will make me die like a coward."

He dreaded lest he should do so; this ordeal was greater than his power to bear it. With the mere sound of this man's voice a longing, so intense in its despairing desire, came on him for this life which they were about to kill in him forever.

The words stung his hearer well-nigh to madness; he turned on the soldiers with all the fury of his race that slumbered so long, but when it awoke was like the lion's rage. Invective, entreaty, conjuration, command, imploring prayer, and ungoverned passion poured in tumultuous words, in agonized eloquence, from his lips: all answer was a quick sign of the hand; and, ere he saw them, a dozen soldiers were round him, his arms were seized, his splendid frame was held as powerless as a lassoed bull; for a moment there was a horrible struggle, then a score of ruthless hands locked him in as in iron gyves, and forced his mouth to silence and his eyes to blindness; this was all the mercy they could give,—to spare him the sight of his friend's slaughter.

Cecil's eyes strained on him with one last longing look, then he raised his hand and gave the signal for his own death-shot.

The leveled carbines covered him; he stood erect

with his face full toward the sun; ere they could fire, a shrill cry pierced the air:

"Wait! in the name of France."

Dismounted, breathless, staggering, with her arms flung upward, and her face bloodless with fear, Cigarette appeared upon the ridge of rising ground.

The cry of command pealed out upon the silence in the voice that the Army of Africa loved as the voice of their Little One. And the cry came too late; the volley was fired, the crash of sound thrilled across the words that bade them pause, the heavy smoke rolled out upon the air, the death that was doomed was dealt.

But beyond the smoke-cloud he staggered slightly, and then stood erect still, almost unharmed, grazed only by some few of the balls. The flash of fire was not so fleet as the swiftness of her love; and on his breast she threw herself, and flung her arms about him, and turned her head backward with her old dauntless sunlit smile as the balls pierced her bosom, and broke her limbs, and were turned away by that shield of warm young life from him.

Her arms were gliding from about his neck, and her shot limbs were sinking to the earth as he caught her up where she dropped to his feet.

"O God! my child! they have killed you!"

He suffered more, as the cry broke from him, than if the bullets had brought him that death which he saw at one glance had stricken down forever all the glory of her childhood, all the gladness of her youth.

She laughed—all the clear, imperious, arch laughter of her sunniest hours unchanged.

"Chut! It is the powder and ball of France! *that* does not hurt. If it was an Arbico's bullet now! But wait! Here is the Marshal's order. He suspends your sentence; I have told him all. You are safe!—do you

And on his breast she threw herself.

hear?—you are safe! How he looks! Is he grieved to live? *Mes Français!* tell him clearer than I can tell—here is the order. The General must have it. No—not out of my hand till the General sees it. Fetch him, some of you—fetch him to me."

"Great Heaven! you have given your life for mine!"

The words broke from him in an agony as he held her upward against his heart, himself so blind, so stunned, with the sudden recall from death to life, and with the sacrifice whereby life was thus brought to him, that he could scarce see her face, scarce hear her voice, but only dimly, incredulously, terribly knew, in some vague sense, that she was dying, and dying thus for him.

She smiled up in his eyes, while even in that moment, when her life was broken down like a wounded bird's, and the shots had pierced through from her shoulder to her bosom, a hot scarlet flush came over her cheeks as she felt his touch and rested on his heart.

"A life! *Tiens!* what is it to give? We hold it in our hands every hour, we soldiers, and toss it in change for a draught of wine. Lay me down on the ground—at your feet—so! I shall live longest that way, and I have much to tell. How they crowd around me! *Mes soldats*, do not make that grief and that rage over me. They are sorry they fired; that is foolish. They were only doing their duty, and they could not hear me in time."

But the brave words could not console those who had killed the Child of the Tricolor; they flung their carbines away, they beat their breasts, they cursed themselves and the mother who had borne them; the silent, rigid, motionless phalanx that had stood there in the dawn to see death dealt in the inexorable penalty of

the law was broken up into a tumultuous, breathless, heart-stricken, infuriated throng, maddened with remorse, convulsed with sorrow, turning wild eyes of hate on him as on the cause through which their darling had been stricken. He, laying her down with unspeakable gentleness as she had bidden him, hung over her, leaning her head against his arm, and watching in paralyzed horror the helplessness of the quivering limbs, the slow flowing of the blood beneath the Cross that shone where that young heroic heart so soon would beat no more.

"Oh, my child, my child!" he moaned, as the full might and meaning of this devotion which had saved him at such cost rushed on him. "What am I worth that you should perish for me? Better a thousand times have left me to my fate! Such nobility, such sacrifice, such love!"

The hot color flushed her face once more; she was strong to the last to conceal that passion for which she was still content to perish in her youth.

"Chut! We are comrades, and you are a brave man. I would do the same for any of my Spahis. Look you, I never heard of your arrest till I heard too of your sentence——"

She paused a moment, and her features grew white and quivered with pain and with the oppression that seemed to lie like lead upon her chest. But she forced herself to be stronger than the anguish which assailed her strength; and she motioned them all to be silent as she spoke on while her voice still should serve her.

"They will tell you how I did it—I have not time. The Marshal gave his word you shall be saved; there is no fear. That is your friend who bends over me here?—is it not? A fair face, a brave face! You will go back to your land—you will live among your own

people—and *she*, she will love you now—now she knows you are of her Order!"

Something of the old thrill of jealous dread and hate quivered through the words, but the purer, nobler nature vanquished it; she smiled up in his eyes, heedless of the tumult round them.

"You will be happy. That is well. Look you—it is nothing that I did. I would have done it for any one of my soldiers. And for this"—she touched the blood flowing from her side with the old, bright, brave smile—"it was an accident; they must not grieve for it. My men are good to me; they will feel such regret and remorse; but do not let them. I am glad to die."

The words were unwavering and heroic, but for one moment a convulsion went over her face; the young life was so strong in her, the young spirit was so joyous in her, existence was so new, so fresh, so bright, so dauntless a thing to Cigarette. She loved life: the darkness, the loneliness, the annihilation of death were horrible to her as the blackness and the solitude of night to a young child. Death, like night, can be welcome only to the weary, and she was weary of nothing on the earth that bore her buoyant steps; the suns, the winds, the delights of the sights, the joys of the senses, the music of her own laughter, the mere pleasure of the air upon her cheeks, or of the blue sky above her head, were all so sweet to her. Her welcome of her death-shot was the only untruth that had ever soiled her fearless lips. Death was terrible; yet she was content—content to have come to it for his sake.

There was a ghastly stricken silence round her. The order she had brought had just been glanced at, but no other thought was with the most callous there than the heroism of her act, than the martyrdom of her death.

The color was fast passing from her lips, and a mor-

tal pallor settling there in the stead of that rich bright hue, once warm as the scarlet heart of the pomegranate. Her head leant back on Cecil's breast, and she felt the great burning tears fall one by one upon her brow as he hung speechless over her: she put her hand upward and touched his eyes softly:

"Chut! What is it to die—just to die? You have *lived* your martyrdom; I could not have done that. Listen, just one moment. You will be rich. Take care of the old man—he will not trouble long—and of Vole-qui-veut and Etoile, and Boule Blanche, and the rat, and all the dogs, will you? They will show you the Château de Cigarette in Algiers. I should not like to think that they would starve."

She felt his lips move with the promise he could not find voice to utter; and she thanked him with that old childlike smile that had lost nothing of its light:

"That is good; they will be happy with you. And see here;—that Arab must have back his white horse: he alone saved you. Have heed that they spare him. And make my grave somewhere where my army passes; where I can hear the trumpets, and the arms, and the passage of the troops—O God! I forgot! I shall not wake when the bugles sound. It will all *end* now, will it not? That is horrible, horrible!"

A shudder shook her as, for the moment, the full sense that all her glowing, redundant, sunlit, passionate life was crushed out forever from its place upon the earth forced itself on and overwhelmed her. But she was of too brave a mould to suffer any foe—even the foe that conquers kings—to have power to appall her. She raised herself, and looked at the soldiery around her, among them the men whose carbines had killed her, whose anguish was like the heart-rending anguish of women.

"Mes Français! That was a foolish word of mine. How many of my bravest have fallen in death; and shall I be afraid of what they welcomed? Do not grieve like that. You could not help it; you were doing your duty. If the shots had not come to me, they would have gone to him; and he has been unhappy so long, and borne wrong so patiently, he has earned the right to live and enjoy. Now I—I have been happy all my days, like a bird, like a kitten, like a foal, just from being young and taking no thought. I should have had to suffer if I had lived; it is much best as it is——"

Her voice failed her when she had spoken the heroic words; loss of blood was fast draining all strength from her, and she quivered in a torture she could not wholly conceal: he for whom she perished hung over her in an agony greater far than hers; it seemed a hideous dream to him that this child lay dying in his stead.

"Can nothing save her?" he cried, aloud. "O God! that you had fired one moment sooner!"

She heard; and looked up at him with a look in which all the passionate, hopeless, imperishable love she had resisted and concealed so long spoke with an intensity she never dreamed.

"She is content," she whispered softly. "You did not understand her rightly; that was all."

"*All!* O God, how I have wronged you!"

The full strength, and nobility, and devotion of this passion he had disbelieved in and neglected rushed on him as he met her eyes; for the first time he saw her as she was, for the first time he saw all of which the splendid heroism of this untrained nature would have been capable under a different fate. And it struck him suddenly, heavily, as with a blow; it filled him with a passion of remorse.

"My darling!—my darling! what have I done to be worthy of such love?" he murmured, while the tears fell from his blinded eyes, and his head drooped until his lips met hers. At the first utterance of that word between them, at the unconscious tenderness of his kisses that had the anguish of a farewell in them, the color suddenly flushed all over her blanched face; she trembled in his arms; and a great shivering sigh ran through her. It came too late, this warmth of love. She learned what its sweetness might have been only when her lips grew numb, and her eyes sightless, and her heart without pulse, and her senses without consciousness.

"Hush!" she answered, with a look that pierced his soul. "Keep those kisses for Miladi. She will have the right to love you; she is of your 'aristocrates,' she is not 'unsexed.' As for me,—I am only a little trooper who has saved my comrade! My soldiers, come round me one instant; I shall not long find words."

Her eyes closed as she spoke; a deadly faintness and coldness passed over her; and she gasped for breath. A moment, and the resolute courage in her conquered; her eyes opened and rested on the war-worn faces of her "children"—rested in a long last look of unspeakable wistfulness and tenderness.

"I cannot speak as I would," she said at length, while her voice grew very faint. "But I have loved you. All is said!"

All was uttered in those four brief words. "She had loved them." The whole story of her young life was told in the single phrase. And the gaunt, battle-scarred, murderous, ruthless veterans of Africa who heard her could have turned their weapons against their own breasts, and sheathed them there, rather than have looked on to see their darling die.

"I have been too quick in anger sometimes—forgive it," she said gently. "And do not fight and curse among yourselves; it is bad amid brethren. Bury my Cross with me, if they will let you; and let the colors be over my grave, if you can. Think of me when you go into battle; and tell them in France——"

For the first time her own eyes filled with great tears as the name of her beloved land paused upon her lips; she stretched her arms out with a gesture of infinite longing, like a lost child that vainly seeks its mother.

"If I could only see France once more! France——"

It was the last word upon her utterance; her eyes met Cecil's in one fleeting upward glance of unutterable tenderness, then with her hands still stretched out northward to where her country was, and with the dauntless heroism of her smile upon her face like light, she gave a tired sigh as of a child that sinks to sleep, and in the midst of her Army of Africa the Little One lay dead.

* * * * * *

In the shadow of his tent, at midnight, he whom she had rescued stood looking down at a bowed, stricken form before him with an exceeding yearning pity in his gaze.

The words had at length been spoken that had lifted from him the burden of another's guilt; the hour at last had come in which his eyes had met the eyes of his friend, without a hidden thought between them. The sacrifice was ended, the martyrdom was over; henceforth this doom of exile and of wretchedness would be but as a hideous dream; henceforth his name would be stainless among men, and the desire of his heart would be given him. And in this hour of release the strongest feeling in him was the sadness of an infinite compassion; and where his brother was stretched prostrate in

shame before him, Cecil stooped and raised him tenderly.

"Say no more," he murmured. "It has been well for me that I have suffered these things. For yourself —if you do indeed repent, and feel that you owe me any debt, atone for it, and pay it, by letting your own life be strong in truth and fair in honor."

And it seemed to him that he himself had done no great or righteous thing in that servitude for another's sake, whose yoke was now lifted off him for evermore; but, looking out over the sleepless camp where one young child alone lay in a slumber that never would be broken, his heart ached with the sense of some great priceless gift received, and undeserved, and cast aside; even while in the dreams of passion that now knew its fruition possible, and the sweetness of communion with the friend whose faith had never forsaken him, he retraced the years of his exile, and thanked God that it was thus with him at the end.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

AT REST.

UNDER the green spring-tide leafage of English woodlands, made musical with the movement and the song of innumerable birds that had their nests among the hawthorn boughs and deep cool foliage of elm and beech, an old horse stood at pasture. Sleeping—with the sun on his gray silken skin, and the flies driven off with a dreamy switch of his tail, and the grasses odorous about his hoofs, with dog-violets, and cowslips, and

wild thyme—sleeping, yet not so surely but at one voice he started, and raised his head with all the eager grace of his youth, and gave a murmuring noise of welcome and delight. He had known that voice in an instant, though for so many years his ear had never thrilled to it: Forest King had never forgotten. Now, scarce a day passed but what it spoke to him some word of greeting or of affection, and his black soft eyes would gleam with their old fire, because its tone brought back a thousand memories of bygone victory—only memories now, when Forest King, in the years of age, dreamed out his happy life under the fragrant shade of the forest wealth of Royallieu.

With his arm over the horse's neck, the exile, who had returned to his birthright, stood silent awhile, gazing out over the land on which his eyes never wearied of resting; the glad, cool, green, dew-freshened earth that was so sweet and full of peace, after the scorched and blood-stained plains, whose sun was as flame, and whose breath was as pestilence. Then his glance came back and dwelt upon the face beside him, the proud and splendid woman's face that had learned its softness and its passion from him alone.

"It was worth banishment to return," he murmured to her. "It was worth the trials that I bore to learn the love that I have known——"

She, looking upward at him with those deep, lustrous, imperial eyes that had first met his own in the glare of the African noon, passed her hand over his lips with a gesture of tenderness far more eloquent from her than from women less proud and more prone to weakness.

"Ah, hush! when I think of what *her* love was, how worthless looks my own! how little worthy of the fate it finds! What have I done that every joy should become mine, when she——"

Her mouth trembled, and the phrase died unfinished; strong as her own love had grown, it looked to her unproven and without desert, beside that which had chosen to perish for his sake. And where they stood with the future as fair before them as the light of the day around them, he bowed his head as before some sacred thing at the whisper of the child who had died for him. The memories of both went back to a place in a desert land where the folds of the tricolor drooped over one little grave, made where the beat of drum, and the sound of moving squadrons, and the ring of the trumpet-call, and the noise of the assembling battalions could be heard by night and day; a grave, where the troops, as they passed it by, saluted and lowered their arms in tender reverence, in faithful unasked homage, because, beneath the Flag they honored, there was carved in the white stone one name that spoke to every heart within the army she had loved, one name on which the Arab sun streamed as with a martyr's glory:

"CIGARETTE,

"ENFANT DE L'ARMÉE, SOLDAT DE LA FRANCE."

THE END.

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